

THE NORTHERN WORLD    BRILL

Sagas, Saints and Settlements



Edited by
Gareth Williams and Paul Bibire



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SAGAS, SAINTS AND SETTLEMENTS

THE NORTHERN WORLD

North Europe and the Baltic c. 400-1700 AD
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VOLUME 11



SAGAS, SAINTS AND SETTLEMENTS

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GARETH WILLIAMS AND PAUL BIBIRE



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Illustration on the cover: A distant view of St. Magnus' Church on Egilsay
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PREFACE

Sagas, Saints and Settlements is the published proceedings of a symposium held at the University of St Andrews in 1996. The aim was to bring together scholars from different disciplines with a shared interest in the history, culture and literature of the Viking Age and of mediaeval Iceland, and to provide a platform for emerging scholars, as well as more established figures in the field, to present their research. The symposium received financial support from the University's School of History and St Leonard's College. This volume contains seven of the papers presented at the symposium. Others were already promised for publication elsewhere, or were part of more substantial works, too large to be appropriate for inclusion in this volume. The delay in publication has been due to first one editor then the other having other pressing commitments which prevented the completion of the volume earlier. The editors are grateful to all the contributors for their patience, to the external readers who provided valuable comments on the text in draft, particularly to Alison Finlay who helped greatly with proof-reading, to all those who have helped along the way with the production of the volume, and to Brill for agreeing to publish the volume in their *Northern World* series.

Six of the seven papers in the volume are linked by a shared interest in Icelandic sagas, but from very different perspectives. The first two deal with issues of classification and genre in Old Icelandic literature. Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir considers the organisation of the component sections of the encyclopaedic manuscript AM 764 4to, and compares the versions of some of the component texts with other versions of the same material which survive in other manuscripts. She argues that the order and the context of the encyclopaedic material is provided by the concept of *aetates mundi* (the ages of the world), and that the decision of what to include or not was constrained by the structure of the manuscript as a whole. She further argues that encyclopaedic literature was less distinct as a genre from saga literature in mediaeval Iceland than has sometimes been suggested, and the elements of the encyclopaedic material in AM 764 4to derive from saga literature, though edited to fit the structure imposed by the *aetates mundi* concept.

Phil Cardew also questions the extent to which Icelandic literature can be separated into distinct genres, this time in the context of the traditional ge-

neric classification of the Icelandic sagas. Taking *Þorskfirðinga saga* as a case study, he questions the appropriateness of the generic classifications, and proposes that the distinction between *fornaldarsögur* and *Íslendinga sögur* is particularly unhelpful in the case of the later *Íslendinga sögur*.

The issue of genre continues in the next two papers, both of which deal with aspects of the relationship between saga literature and hagiography. Ásdís Egilsdóttir considers the difference between the *Sturlunga saga* version of *Hrafn's saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* and the longer independent version, noting that the latter contains a considerable body of material in hagiographical style which is excluded from the *Sturlunga saga* version. She then explores this hagiographical material in more detail, together with the question of why this should be included in what is in other ways a conventional feud narrative. Ásdís concludes that Hrafn's life and death showed signs of sanctity, with only post mortem miracles required to confirm his sainthood. The portrayal of Hrafn's life was thus prepared partly in the style of a saint's life, borrowing from a number of hagiographical models, in anticipation that Hrafn would eventually be sanctified.

Two of the saintly models for *Hrafn's saga* were St Thomas of Canterbury and St Magnús of Orkney, which leads to the next paper by Haki Antonsson. Haki considers the various saga accounts of the life and martyrdom of St Magnús, and compares them with both Latin lives of St Thomas and the Icelandic *Thómas saga II*, with a particular focus on the possible influence of Thomas' biographer, Robert of Cricklade. According to *Magnúss saga lengri*, a certain 'Master Robert' composed a Latin *vita* of St Magnús around 1137. Haki explores the evidence to link this Master Robert with Robert of Cricklade, and concludes that while it is not possible to prove that Master Robert and Robert of Cricklade were one and the same, it is likely, and that it is demonstrable that 'Master Robert' was influenced by the corpus on St Thomas, calling the date of the earliest *vita* of St Magnús into question.

As well as being a saint, Magnús was also earl of Orkney, and the next two papers combine sagas with other forms of evidence to explore aspects of the history of the earldom of Orkney, and the influence of the Orkney earls on the Scottish mainland. Gareth Williams uses the sagas together with archaeological and numismatic material, as well as a variety of historical evidence from mediaeval Scotland, to reassess the origins and purpose of land assessment units known as *ouncelands* and *pennylands*, found in many

areas of Norse settlement in Scotland. He looks at pre-Norse assessment systems, as well as relating the distribution of *ouncelands* and *pennylands* to the patterns of political authority described in the sagas and in other sources, and relates this to a broader picture of economy and society. Rejecting the established theory that *ouncelands* and *pennylands* derive from the Norwegian *leiðangr* system, he attributes them to a home-grown system of tribute to the Orkney earls, placing the spread of *ouncelands* and *pennylands* elsewhere in the context of the expansion of the authority of the earls of Orkney in the late tenth and eleventh centuries.

This expansion is also a key theme in the following paper. Barbara Crawford considers the strategies behind the expansion of the power of the earls of Orkney into the northern parts of the Scottish mainland. She does this by comparing the saga accounts of the struggle for control between the earls of Orkney and the *mormaers* of Moray with the distribution of Scandinavian place-names within the disputed areas. By focusing on particular place-name types in their geographical context, she argues that a key element in the earldom strategy for control of northern Scotland was the importance of transportation. She suggests that control of a timber supply on the mainland was vital for the Orkney earls, since Orkney itself provided no timber for shipbuilding, while for control within mainland Scotland, horses were as important as ships, and she argues that a number of Scandinavian place-names across northern Scotland can be linked with a programme of horse breeding by the earls or their deputies.

Scandinavian place-names in Scotland form a link with the final paper by Simon Taylor, although here the focus moves further south to central Scotland. This is the only paper not to make use of saga material, as the paper looks at Scandinavian settlement in an area only touched on occasionally, and in passing, in saga literature. Instead, Simon compares the distribution of *-by*-place-names with hogback tombstones, and seeks to set Scandinavian settlement in central Scotland in the context of the evidence provided by historical sources from the British Isles. He argues against the contention that the *-by*-names in central Lowland Scotland are the result of Anglo-Scandinavian settlement from the Danelaw in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, and prefers to place the Scandinavian settlement in this area in the tenth century, a period in which control of the Forth-Clyde area was important both for the Dublin-York axis to the south and to the emerging Scottish kingdom to the north. The paper thus provides an effective reminder that while the sagas are a valuable source of information

for Scandinavian settlement in the north and west of Scotland, and particularly for the earldom of Orkney, there was an important area of Scandinavian settlement in Scotland which had nothing to do with the earls of Orkney, and about which the compilers of the sagas apparently knew nothing.

Gareth Williams
Pytchley

Paul Bibire
Crail

THE WORLD AND ITS AGES

The organisation of an 'encyclopaedic' narrative in MS AM 764 4to

Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir

The centuries have passed down to us a handful of relatively large medieval Icelandic manuscripts which contain what is often referred to as encyclopaedic material or *alfræði*. Most of these are known to us principally through the efforts of Kristian Kålund who edited some of this material for *Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur* in 1908 and 1917–18.¹ Icelandic manuscripts of this nature have generally not engendered great enthusiasm among scholars. They have been largely bypassed by modern scholarship, in part no doubt because they do not stand out as original thought or great literature. Yet obviously we will not arrive at a truthful picture of literary activity in Iceland in the Middle Ages only through the study of masterpieces, and our understanding of the masterpieces is lacking if we neglect the study of their background.

It would be inaccurate to claim, however, that these encyclopaedic manuscripts had been totally neglected. But few studies have been devoted to them principally. Scholars tend to turn to these manuscripts if they contain a version of a text they are editing but the codices are not generally seen to merit a study on their own, as compilations.² It is not a coincidence that Hauksbók is the best known of these manuscripts since it contains, as well as encyclopaedic texts, such famous works as *Völuspá*, *Landnámabók* and *Elucidarius*. The scant attention meted out to encyclopaedic manuscripts is also due to the understandable tendency in scholars to be more interested in genuine Icelandic works—seeing foreign works translated into Icelandic as a rewarding object of study only insofar as they help to explain the development of the indigenous literature and of the language. This is of course a simplification but I suspect these reasons go a long way towards explaining the silence that has surrounded these books—as well as the derogatory remarks sometimes meted out to them when they are mentioned.

¹ Kr. Kålund, ed., *Alfræði íslenzk* I, III, STUAGNL 37, 45 (København, 1908, 1917–18). Some of these texts and other fragments previously unedited are printed in R. Simek's *Alt-nordische Kosmographie. Studien und Quellen zu Weltbild und Weltbeschreibung in Norwegen und Island vom 12. bis zum 14. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1990), but the transcripts are very unreliable.

² A recent exception to this is Ian McDougall's Ph.D. thesis (University of London) on *Codex Lindesianus*.

One of these codices is a fourteenth century quarto which bears the number 764 in the Arnamagnæan collection. It is a vellum manuscript, now consisting of 43 full-sized leaves and 5 smaller leaves, some mere slips. There are five lacunae in the latter half of the codex and two small leaves seem to have been lost after fols. 11 and 15. Exactly how many leaves have been lost in the lacunae is impossible to determine, not least because the manuscript is not made up of regular gatherings. Two leaves, which belong in the last lacuna, have at some point become separated from the rest of the codex and are now catalogued as fragment *m* in AM 162 fol. The manuscript is written in many hands—I have identified ten in the first half of the codex but there are clearly some additional hands in the second half—and shows all the signs of having been produced in a scriptorium of some sort. Paleographic and orthographic evidence points firmly to Skagafjörður in Northern Iceland as its place of origin and it was probably written in or for the Benedictine convent at Reynistaður in the 1370s or early 1380s.³

AM 764 contains a wealth of material on widely varying subjects—we have here a geographical description of the world, saints' lives, astronomy, biblical extracts, lists of popes and emperors, an extract from *Breta sögur* (Geoffrey of Monmouth), information about Antichrist, Marian miracles etc. etc. Scholars have often been led to this book and quite a number of extracts from it have been printed here and there but it has never been edited in its entirety and although some scholars have recognised its importance it has generally been viewed as being haphazardly and carelessly assembled—an 'absurd ragbag of material' was the verdict of one eminent scholar⁴.

I would suggest that such remarks are a little hard on the nuns at Reynistaður (and those who may have assisted them in compiling the book, if they needed any help that is). They humbly called their book *annálabæklingr*—a booklet, *libellus*—though this hefty quarto doesn't look as if it ever fitted into a pocket. That it is a book of annals is perhaps more accurate although chronicle might be closer to the truth. It must be mentioned here that it is quite possible that the label *annálabæklingr* was only meant to refer to the first half of the codex and that this part of the book was not compiled by the scribes at Reynistaður but was copied wholesale from an earlier codex. The first half of 764 (fols. 1-23) consists of a brief history of the world

³ On the date and provenance of the manuscript see Ólafur Halldórsson, 'Rímbeqlus-miður', *Opuscula II*, 2. Bibliotheca Arnarnagnæana XXV, 2 (Copenhagen, 1977), 32–49; P.G. Foote, ed., *A Saga of St Peter the Apostle. Perg. 4:o nr 19 in The Royal Library, Stockholm*, EIMF XIX (Copenhagen, 1990), 11–65.

⁴ C.E. Fell, 'Anglo-Saxon saints in Old Norse sources and vice versa', *Proceedings of the Eighth Viking Congress. Århus 24–31 August 1977*, ed. by H. Bekker-Nielsen, P.G. Foote and O. Olsen (Odense, 1981), p. 99.

whereas the second half is mostly taken up by saints' lives and *exempla*. It is in the first half that the best part of the encyclopaedic material is found and it becomes clear on closer inspection that although the various strands of information may be drawn from disparate sources they are not merely thrown together in a haphazard manner. On the contrary, the various bits are introduced at the right moment in the appropriate context.

The order and the context is provided by the old concept of *aetates mundi*, the ages of the world. *Sex eru greindir i bókum aldrar þessa heims*, 'six ages of this world are distinguished in books', it says on f. 1v30 in 764. The history of the world, from the Creation, is divided up into ages in accordance with a scheme propagated by St Augustine. Although St Augustine's formulation of this idea was to become the most important one in the Middle Ages, he is by no means the first writer, not even the first Christian writer, to divide history up into ages. World-ages were an important concept within Judaism and one encounters them in the works of early Church Fathers such as Origen, Jerome and Ambrose.⁵ These age-schemes were based on interpretations of passages of the Bible—the four kingdoms in the Book of Daniel (2.31-35, 7.2-14), for instance, inspired a fourfold division and the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Mt. 20.1-6) gave rise to a five-part scheme.⁶ But the Augustinian scheme, with its exposition of six ages (or, in fact, eight) became the favoured model. It was incorporated into Isidore's *Etymologiae* (V. 38-39) and later found its way into other influential works such as the writings of Bede⁷ and Honorius Augustodunensis.⁸

It is in his commentary on Genesis, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, that Augustine gives the fullest account of the *aetates mundi*, but the concept crops up elsewhere in his writings, perhaps most famously towards the end of *De civitate Dei* (lib. XXII). Augustine draws a parallel between Genesis and the course of the world. As the Creation took six days, so the world will pass through six ages before reaching the seventh age, the sabbath. Accord-

⁵ On *aetates mundi* before Augustine see R. Schmidt, 'Aetates mundi. Die Weltalter als Gliederungsprinzip der Geschichte', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 67 (1955-6), pp. 305-6; B. Gatz, *Weltalter, goldene Zeit und sinnverwandte Vorstellungen* (Hildesheim, 1967), pp. 104-13; M. Förster, 'Die Weltzeitalter bei den Angelsachsen', *Neusprachliche Studien. Festgabe Karl Luick, Die Neueren Sprachen* 6. Beiheft (Marburg, 1925), pp. 183-7; H. Tristram, *Sex aetates mundi. Die Weltzeitalter bei den Angelsachsen und den Iren* (Heidelberg, 1985), pp. 19-22.

⁶ Förster, *Weltzeitalter*, pp. 184-85; Schmidt, 'Aetates', pp. 289, 301-3.

⁷ The most elaborate account is found in *De temporum ratione*, cap. LXVI-LXXI. CCL 123B, pp. 461-544.

⁸ Cf. V.I.J. Flint, ed., 'Honorius Augustodunensis Imago mundi', *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen age* 57 (1982) (Liber III), pp. 123-51.

ing to Augustine the first age extends from Adam to Noah, the second from Noah to Abraham, the third from Abraham to David, the fourth from David until the Exile in Babylonia, the fifth from the Exile until the birth of Christ, and the sixth age extends from Christ's birth *usque in finem saeculi*—until the end of this world.⁹ The seventh age presented a problem. There were chiliastic ideas, popular among Christians, about an earthly sabbath after the second coming of Christ, a thousand-year reign before the Last Judgment. These ideas were influenced by Judaism and strengthened by numerological speculations which allotted each age 1000 years, resulting in a scheme of 7 x 1000 years of earthly history before the eternal heavenly kingdom.¹⁰ Augustine was keen to counter such millennarianism. For him the seventh age was therefore not the time of bodily resurrection but a period of rest for the souls of the righteous, it was *civitas Dei peregrinans*, and it also signified the life of the Church.¹¹ The seventh age of the Augustinian scheme could be seen, and indeed Bede formulates it thus, as running parallel to the six ages—Abel's soul was the first to enter it.¹² The eighth age was beyond time, in a sense—it was to come after the Last Judgment and represented the eternal life of the blessed in Heaven. It was the age of resurrection, the eighth day which equalled the first day of a new beginning.¹³

The *aetates mundi* became a commonplace in historical works in the Middle Ages, be they annals, chronicles or other sorts of *historiae*, and they are also found in works belonging to other genres, such as homilies and poetry.¹⁴ This holds true for Old Norse literature as well—*aetates mundi*, called *heimsaldrar* in Icelandic, occur in homilies and Saints Lives but first and foremost in works of a (Christian) historical nature.¹⁵

⁹ *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, lib. I, PL 34, pp. 190–193; *De diversis questionibus*, LXXXIII, PL 40, 43.

¹⁰ Schmidt, 'Aetates', 293–6. The 7000 years were the result of a combination of the week of Genesis and the words of the Psalter (89,4): *Quoniam mille anni ante oculos tuos tamque dies hesterni, quae praeteriit, et custodia in nocte*. Cf. also Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium. Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (rev. ed. London, 1993), pp. 19–36.

¹¹ Schmidt, 'Aetates', 295–7; A. Luneau, *L'Histoire du salut chez les Pères de l'Eglise. La doctrine des âges du monde* (Paris, 1964), pp. 321–6.

¹² Cf. *De temp. rat.*, LXVII, CCL 123B, pp. 535–7.

¹³ Luneau, *L'Histoire du salut*, p. 326; Bede, *De temp. rat.*, LXXI, pp. 542–4.

¹⁴ On the *aetates mundi* within different genres, see Tristram, *Six aetates mundi*, pp. 61–179.

¹⁵ Jakob Benediktsson, *Verdensaldr*, KLN XIX, pp. 651–3. Jakob mentions both the Icelandic and Norwegian Homily Book, *Mariu saga*, *Sjörn*, *Elucidarius*, *Postola sögur*, *Hauksbók* and *Veraldar saga*. Cf. also R. Boyer, 'Les âges de la vie dans la Scandinavie ancienne', *Les âges de la vie au moyen âge*, Cultures et civilisations médiévales VII (Paris, 1992), pp. 7–21, esp. pp. 14–16.

It is into this framework that the scribes of 764 work their diverse material and they thus manage to bring together many heterogeneous passages, place them in a historic context and give them symbolic value. When this is borne in mind the make-up of the codex becomes infinitely more understandable. This is in fact a universal chronicle of sorts, tracing the history of the world, which for these scribes is synonymous with the history of Christianity, from the days of Adam (first age), through Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and other leaders of the Jews to the sixth age which begins with the birth of Jesus. The sixth age is brought to a climax with the prophecy about the coming of Antichrist which signals the final struggle which will culminate in Judgment Day. Before the story turns to that day which belongs to the eighth age, the seventh age needs to be covered. This is difficult as the scribes recognise: *Af sjöunda heimsaldri kunnum vér fátt at segja því at hann er eigi í þessu lífi heldr í öðru*, 'of the seventh age of the world we know how to tell little, because it is not in this life but in the other', (f. 22r18—the Icelandic chronicle follows Bede's example in postulating that the seventh age runs parallel to the other six). Rather than remain totally silent on the subject they provide information mediated to the living through miracles. The description of the fate awaiting the soul after the death of the body at the beginning of the seventh age is followed by three 'visionary miracles' where the dead show themselves to their offspring and tell them of their circumstances in the afterlife: one is in Hell, another in Purgatory and the third one is with the blessed ones. The souls await, each in its place, the day of Judgement which is then duly described: the earth is cleansed with fire and a new age, the eighth (and the first) begins.

St Augustine drew, as was mentioned above, a parallel between the six ages of the world and the six days of Creation. The first age begins with the hexaemeron—the Creation is the starting point of history. This tradition is adhered to in AM 764 where the hexaemeron takes pride of place and it is here that one encounters the greater part of the strictly encyclopaedic material, *i.e.* texts of a scientific nature, contained in the codex. The backbone of the narrative, however, comes from Genesis. Additional information is then introduced into the account of each day of the creation. We learn for instance that the angels were created on the second day and in connection with that are told the story of Lucifer. The planets were created on the fourth day so the account of the fourth day is the appropriate place for astronomical lore—the spheres, the distance between the planets etc. And the account of the creation of man on the sixth day gives an opportunity to touch on physiognomy. Such amplification of the hexaemeral narrative of the Bible is not peculiar to our Icelandic scribes. A brief study of the development of

Genesis commentaries reveals that those who compiled the Icelandic chronicle work within a well-established tradition which can be traced back to the beginnings of Biblical exegesis.

Genesis, the first book of the Bible, naturally forms an introduction of sorts to the whole work and therefore quickly acquired great significance for Bible studies, and indeed for elementary Christian education. It was in Genesis that one was to seek answers to questions about the beginning of the world and the origins of man, indeed the origins of history.¹⁶ It introduced the student to the major themes of Christianity and it became one of the most extensively commented books of the Bible. In the Western Church, a rich tradition of commentary on Genesis developed, where the hexaemeron formed the crucial core, and to which many of the most illustrious thinkers and scholars contributed.¹⁷ In these commentaries, knowledge about the physical world, about natural phenomena and historical geography, is incorporated into the commentary in order to illuminate the reader's perception of Creation and orientate him in the geography of the lands where the events described in the Scriptures took place. This tradition can be traced back to the School of Alexandria (second to third century AD), the first organised group of Christian thinkers. The Alexandrian fathers owed much to Judaism, in particular to Philo Judaeus, who in turn was imbued by Platonism. It was through the influence of Philo that the Alexandrians, in particular Origen, insisted on using secular knowledge and philosophy to throw light on the Scriptures. The seven liberal arts were seen as the necessary education for understanding the Bible. The Alexandrians, moreover, laid the foundations of allegorical exegesis based on the theory of the three- or fourfold sense of the Scriptures. In time, largely through the efforts of the Cappadocian fathers, secular learning became a tool to aid the exposition of, principally, the allegorical sense, but it also served to illuminate the historical, literal sense.¹⁸ The inclusion of encyclopaedic material in trac-

¹⁶ C. Spicq, *Esquisse d'une histoire de l'exégèse latine au Moyen Age*, Bibliothèque Thomiste XXVI (Paris, 1944), p. 58; J. McClure, 'Bede's *Notes on Genesis* and the training of the Anglo-Saxon Clergy', *The Bible in the Medieval World. Essays in memory of Beryl Smalley*, ed. K. Walsh and D. Wood (Oxford, 1985), p. 26; A. Holtsmark, *Studier i Snorres mytologi*, Skrifter utgitt av Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo II. Hist.-Filos. Klasse. Ny Serie. No. 4 (Oslo, 1964), p. 27.

¹⁷ For an overview of commentaries on Genesis Cf. J. Zahlten, *Creatio mundi. Darstellungen der sechs Schöpfungstage und naturwissenschaftliches Weltbild im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 1979), pp. 86–101.

¹⁸ Cf. B. Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (2nd ed. Oxford, 1952), pp. 1–13; Zahlten, *Creatio mundi*, pp. 90–1; C.W. Jones, 'Some Introductory Remarks on Bede's Commentary on Genesis.' *Sacris erudiri. Jaarboek voor Godsdienstwetenschappen* 19 (1969–1970), p. 120; Mangelot, 'Hexaméron', p. 2336.

tates on Genesis is therefore bound up, from the earliest age, with the theory of the three or four senses of Scripture—it served to prop up the literal sense on which the allegorical and moral interpretations were built. Consequently, one finds in these works information on diverse subjects, e.g. geography and astronomy, on herbs, beasts and stones, on human physiology and the nature of angels. Genesis became, for the Middle Ages, ‘the textbook of external nature’.¹⁹

Although commentary on Genesis was thus a well-established part of the exegetical tradition from the beginning, the twelfth century witnesses what can be called an explosion in hexaemeral writings.²⁰ The influx of classical learning in the twelfth century brought about a change in the relationship between theology and the natural sciences although it should be stressed that the latter continued to be seen as an ancillary subject. The renewed interest in the created world manifested itself not only in the numerous commentaries on the hexaemeron but also in the prolific output of cosmological works by twelfth-century scholars. Among them were some which came to be known in Iceland in one form or another: Honorius Augustodunensis’ *Imago mundi*, Petrus Comestor’s *Historia scholastica* and Guillaume de Conches’ *Philosophia mundi*.

The scribes of 764 therefore probably had a wide array of models on which to base their treatment of the Creation and the created world. To construct their book the way they did was a most natural choice for a learned person in the Middle Ages, whether he or she was in religious orders or an educated layperson. The text in 764 is not a commentary on Scripture, it does not begin each section with a quotation from the Bible followed by an exposition. But it does follow the main events of Genesis, in the right order, occasionally quoting verbatim from the Bible, in other instances (and more frequently) paraphrasing the Bible text. And the Bible material is augmented with extraneous material, mostly encyclopaedic, and in that sense 764 represents the continuation of a tradition which extends, as we have seen, back to Origen.

The scribes are also true to that tradition in that they begin their history with a geographical survey, announcing that this is for the benefit of the reader / listener, so that he / she may better grasp the events that are to follow:

Í upphafi þessa litla annála bæklinga skulu vér skrifa nukkut lítit af heimskringlunni ok af þeim löndum er í henni standa ok eigi síðr

¹⁹ Jones, ‘Introductory Remarks’, p. 118.

²⁰ The tables which Zahlten appends to his book show this quite clearly, *cf.* pp. 230–7.

höfuðborgum hversu þær hafa í fyrstu smíðaz til þess at ljósara verði lesanda manni eða tilhlýðanda þeirra atburða eða tíðenda er vorðit hafa frá því er guð skapaði veröldina ok vér höfum fundit í bókum skilríkum eða annálum fyrri manna. (f. 1r 1-5)

At the beginning of this small annal-booklet we must write something small about the circuit of the world and about those lands which stand within it, and no less about the principal cities, how they were founded at first, so that it might become clearer to the reader or listener about those events or tidings which have occurred since God shaped the world, and [which] we have found in wise books or in the annals of earlier people.

What follows is a brief description of the world. Similar descriptions are found in several other Icelandic manuscripts but the one in 764 is among the longest of them.²¹ It seems to be an amalgamation of two texts. It shows, on the one hand, a close affinity to a passage in the fragment AM 736 I 4to and in ms. AM 194 8vo where the passage accompanies the so called *Leiðarvísan* by abbot Nikulás Bergsson.²² On the other hand, the description in 764 contains a passage which is identical to a text found in *Nikulás saga erkibiskups* by Bergr Sökkason.²³ The passage in 764 starts with the latter's description of Asia and follows it almost verbatim until it comes to a description of Paradise which seems to be taken from a source similar to AM 194 8vo. (That source cannot be AM 194 8vo itself—discrepancies between the texts are too many and 194 was written in 1387, after 764 had been completed.) The Paradise description as it stands in 764 includes a short passage on the phoenix but 194 has an additional phoenix-legend, namely the account of how the bird is reborn out of its ashes. This is not found in 764—its text continues immediately after the (shorter) phoenix-passage with an account of the four rivers which flow from Paradise. Following this is a description of Asia Minor, again corresponding closely with *Nikulás saga*. *Nik.s.* only contains a description of Asia since its author was primarily interested in the area where the events of his saga took place. We do not, therefore, find any more parallels between *Nik. s.* and 764 after Asia has been covered. The remainder of the world description in 764 corresponds largely to the description in 736 I and 194 8vo.

When more than one version of a text exists it is naturally tempting to try to arrive at some theory of how these different versions came about. As I mentioned at the beginning, scholars have usually turned their attention to

²¹ For an overview of these descriptions cf. Simek, *Altnordische Kosmographie*, pp. 143–211.

²² *Alfræði íslenzk* I, pp. 3–12.

²³ C.R. Unger, ed., *Heilagra Manna Sögur* II (Christiania, 1877), p. 55.

the encyclopaedic manuscripts in order to pluck out passages which are of particular interest to them. In so doing they sometimes overlook the context in which these passages are placed in the various codices and therefore miss clues which could help to explain the discrepancies between different versions. The Paradise description in AM 764 4to and AM 194 8vo might serve as an example here.

It is worth noting of the description in 764 that Paradise seems here to be synonymous with the garden of Eden: the description is restricted to that Old Testament notion. It is a starting point for history rather than the dwelling-place of the blessed. The idea of Paradise as a heavenly abode comes with the New Testament, and that idea was the more significant for Christians in the Middle Ages although the images and notions of the Old Testament remained compelling.²⁴ If one compares the text in 764 with that in 194 one discovers that the latter text retains allusions to the New Testament. In it Adam and the tree of knowledge are mentioned but then the scribe goes on to describe how there is perennial day in Paradise, no hatred and no hunger, and angels who sing to amuse the inhabitants. The inhabitants are *salur godra manna ok una þar til doma-dags, sidan er gud lauk upp, þa er hann leiddi þangat önd þiofs þess, er lif sitt lét aa crossinum*, ‘the souls of good men, and they are content there until Judgement Day, after God opened [it] up, when he led thither the soul of the thief who lost his life on the Cross’.²⁵ This information has its equivalent for instance in Isidore, but it is not found in 764. The explanation for that has to be sought in the organising principles of the compilers. The Crucifixion belongs to the sixth age of the world and cannot be included here if the compilers are to maintain a strict *ordo temporum*. This was presumably no concern of the 194 scribe who was amplifying Nikulás’ *Leiðarvísan* since he was writing a different sort of book. Similar arguments can be made when it comes to explaining the difference between 764 and *Nikulás saga* on this point—*Nikulás saga*, unlike 764, includes a reference to the Fall and the Redemption.

Rudolf Simek has argued that the world descriptions in 764, 194, *Nikulás saga* and other Icelandic manuscripts all go back, ultimately, to the same text—a proto-text of sorts. He postulates that a description of the world, based on Latin sources, was put together in Iceland in the twelfth century and that all four texts are derived from that proto-description via various missing links.²⁶ He rejects the possibility that AM 764 depends on *Nikulás saga* for its description of Asia despite the fact that the texts corre-

²⁴ *DMA*, s.v.

²⁵ *Alfræði íslenzk* I, p. 4.

²⁶ Simek, *Altnordische Kosmographie*, pp. 370–4.

spond closely and that there is another text in 764 which seems to come from *Nik. s.* (an exemplum on f. 31v cf. *HMS* II, 83). This is not the place to refute Simek's arguments in detail but it seems to me that he too readily assumes that encyclopaedic literature existed chiefly as a separate genre in medieval Iceland. AM 764 shows how encyclopaedic material is woven into a historical narrative. It also shows that its compilers drew on different sources, their work must have been dictated to a certain extent by the choice of books available to them, and they may have acquired their 'encyclopaedic' texts from books which the modern reader would not classify as encyclopedias. The passage on Antichrist and the Last Judgment in the last part of the chronicle (ages six and eight), for instance probably came from *Tveg-gja postula saga Jóns og Jakobs*, but not directly from the theological compilation which is its source.²⁷ The scribes will have had no qualms about copying the chapter from *Nikulás saga*, possibly because the world description they had to hand was less full when it came to information about Asia (as the text in 736 I and 194 would suggest). It is significant here that the 764 scribe makes one change in the text which he / she otherwise follows closely. Where Bergr talks about two Indias (*Asia maior hefir morg storlond ok hofudborgir I ser: þar er India hvartveggi ...*, 'Asia Major has many great lands and principal cities in it; there is each of the two Indias'²⁸) the 764 scribe changes it to three. This may be because (s)he knew better—his / her other source made it clear that there were indeed three *Indíalönd* (cf. 736 I).

After describing the areas around the Mediterranean (Asia Minor, Africa) the text in 764 turns to Europe, working its way north, mentioning Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Russia, Finnmörk and Bjarmaland. It then says:

Af Biarmalandi ganga lönd óbyggð af norðr ætt unz Grænland tekr við. Suðr frá Grænlandi liggr Helluland þá Markland, þaðan er eigi langt til Vínlands. Ísland er ey mikil. Hon er norðuz í kristni svá at menn viti. (1v27-29)

From Bjarmaland uninhabited lands stretch from the north until Greenland takes over. South from Greenland lies Helluland, then Markland; from there it is not far to Vínland. Iceland is a large island. It is furthest north in Christendom as far as people know.

The Middle Ages inherited from the Greeks a picture of the 'whole world' as a circle, and it is with the Greeks that one finds the beginnings of geo-

²⁷ Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, 'Dómsdagslýsing í AM 764 4to', *Opuscula* X, Bibliotheca Arnemagnaeana XL (Copenhagen, 1996), pp. 186–93.

²⁸ *Heilagra Manna Sögur* II, p. 55.

graphical narrative, which flourished in medieval times, in which it was possible to lead the reader around the perimeter of the earth.²⁹ The medieval 'world-tours', visual or verbal, 'offered their audience a pleasingly synoptic view of the earth's circuit, embellished with curious details of its most exotic phenomena'.³⁰ Such a verbal world-tour seems to be the aim of the scribes who were responsible for the chronicle in 764. The purpose of this brief description of the world is to orientate the audience in the world, so that they can put the historical events that follow in a geographical context. But it is interesting that, apart from the passage on Paradise, the description in 764 does not contain a lot of 'curious details of exotic phenomena'. It is very much down to earth (in more than one sense). The text does mention exotic regions, such as the uninhabited lands north of Norway and the lands it is claimed lie south of Greenland. But unlike the authors of some other descriptions of these regions³¹ our scribes seems to be not in the least interested in mirabilia.

Another important geographical concept of Greek origins is the *oikoumene*, the 'inhabited earth' or the 'known world'. It can be defined, in the words of James Romm, 'as a region made coherent by the intercommunication of its inhabitants'.³² Beyond the *oikoumene* was 'another world', mysterious regions inhabited by monstrous races and fantastic animals.³³ As can be deduced from our scribe's choice of words when describing Iceland (*Ísland er ey mikil ... norðuz í kristni*) the *oikoumene* he is concerned with is the Christian world. Christianity defines the borders of the *oikoumene* to the north. The scribe has mentioned areas which lie outside those borders but (s)he does not take great interest in them; they need not concern him / her or the audience of the book. The scribe traverses, metaphorically speaking, these regions but they are clearly outside his / her intended boundaries, the ecumenical boundaries of the Church. The description fittingly ends at home and although the boundaries of the *orbis terrae* had widened considerably since Roman times, our scribe and his / her audience—perhaps young novices at Reynistaður—still find themselves sitting on the remote edge of the *oikoumene*—in Ultima Thule.³⁴ Having mapped the *orbis terrae* firmly out in their minds they are now prepared to begin their journey through the ages of the world.

²⁹ J.S. Romm, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 29, 31.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

³¹ *Historia Norvegiae* and *Konungs skuggsjá* in particular but also *Hauksbók*.

³² Romm, *Edges of the Earth*, p. 37.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 82–3, 121–5.

³⁴ On the significance of Ultima Thule see Romm, *Edges of the Earth*, pp. 156–8.

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THE QUESTION OF GENRE IN THE LATE *ÍSLENDINGA*
SÖGUR:
A CASE STUDY OF *ÞORSKFIRÐINGA SAGA*.

Phil Cardew

The question of generic classification within the Icelandic sagas is thorny and frequently overlooked, the terms used in the description of the sagas being so ingrained in the psyche of scholarship as to be adopted automatically and, very often, unquestioningly. Not since 1975 has the issue of the validity of classificatory terms been seriously addressed;¹ since then, if debate has arisen at all, it has been over the need to identify the generic traits of a particular class, or to place texts inside (or outside) individual genres.² The purpose of this paper is not, however, to raise once again the questions debated so long ago, but to consider a range of accepted views about the sagas as a whole, and to combine that consideration with an examination of one particular saga, *Þorskfirðinga saga*, from a generic perspective.

Having made some fairly bold, and assertive statements, I need (as an introduction to the discussion that is to follow) to outline that position which I regard as accepted by a large percentage of those scholars working on the sagas, especially those who count English as their first language.

Firstly, with reference to the classificatory terms used in the description of the sagas, I suggest that those outlined by Sigurður Nordal in his essay of 1953 'Sagalitteraturen'³ are the most commonly used. Although Nordal writes in Danish, I will use the Icelandic equivalents of the terms he discusses which are: *byskupa sögur*, *konunga sögur*, *Íslendinga sögur*, *fornaldarsögur* and *riddara sögur*. These terms, and their English equivalents have become so generally used that many secondary texts, deriving from the last 30 years or so, either use them uncritically, or refer to particular genres identified in this way. Those attempts which have been made to enhance, or change the emphasis, of this model generally fall into two categories: 1) attempts to make the model

¹ T.M. Andersson, 'Splitting the saga', *Scandinavian studies* 47 (1975), pp. 437–41; J. Harris, 'Genre in the saga literature: a squib', *Scandinavian studies* 47 (1975), pp. 427–36; L. Lönnroth, 'The concept of genre in saga literature', *Scandinavian studies*, 47 (1975), pp. 419–26.

² See, for example: P. Hallberg, 'Some aspects of the *fornaldarsögur* as a corpus', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 97 (1982), pp. 1–35, Hermann Pálsson and P. Edwards, *Legendary fiction in medieval Iceland* (Reykjavík, 1971), and D. Macek, 'Some stylistic features of the classical Icelandic sagas' in R. Simek, Jónas Kristjánsson and H. Bekker-Nielsen, eds., *Sagnaskemmtun: studies in honour of Hermann Pálsson* (Wien, Köln, Graz, 1986), pp. 209–22.

³ Sigurður Nordal, 'Sagalitteraturen', in *Litteratur-historie B: Norge og Island* (Stockholm, Oslo, Copenhagen, 1953), pp. 180–273.

more sophisticated (by the inclusion of sub-genres)⁴ or 2) attempts to provide a complementary model which resolves some of the problems attached to the classification of individual sagas within the standard model.⁵

The standard terms identify those sagas which are placed within them by the nature of their subject matter—bishops, kings, Icelanders, legendary characters, and (more loosely) knights (or chivalric events)—a means of classification which would seem, at face value, to be reasonably objective and unproblematic. However, there are interesting anomalies, and sub-texts, to the nomenclature used—matters which affect not only the way in which *all* sagas are studied, but also the ways in which individual genres are approached. On the broadest level these anomalies and sub-texts can be identified thus:

1: The standard generic labels applied to the sagas derive from both indigenous, and medieval, sources, and indigenous, and modern ones. Lars Lönnroth, in his article ‘The concept of genre in saga literature’⁶ points out, with some justification, that medieval Icelanders would not have recognised the generic labels which modern scholarship applies to medieval sagas. More accurately, medieval Icelanders would not have recognised *all* of the classificatory labels in current use. In an earlier article⁷ Lönnroth cites a catalogue of the Viðey monastery library of 1396, which mentions, amongst other works, *Riddara sögur í tveim bókum* ‘sagas of knights in two volumes’, together with the afterword of *Mágus saga jarls* which tells us that: *þeir vilja til heyra frásagnir, sem þeim þikki kátligar til gamans, svá sem er Þiðreks saga, Flóvents saga eðr aðrar riddara sögur* ‘they wish to hear accounts, which may seem enjoyable to them for purposes of entertainment, such as the saga of Þiðrekr, the saga of Flóvent or other sagas of knights’. Lönnroth also alludes to fairly common references to *konunga ævi*, *konunga sögur*, *konunga tal* and *ævisögur konunga* ‘kings’ lives, kings’ sagas, kings’ enumeration, and biographies of kings’.

This would seem to suggest, then, that whilst the terms *Íslendinga sögur*, *fornaldarsögur* and *byskupa sögur* are unknown, lexically, from the Middle Ages, those of *konunga sögur* and *riddara sögur* are not. This opinion has been justified with the kind help of the Arnamagnæan Dictionary Project in

⁴ As, for example, in K. Schier, *Sagaliteratur* (Stuttgart, 1970) which differentiates between ‘Sagaliteratur im engeren sinn’ [saga literature in the narrower sense] and ‘Sagaliteratur im weiteren sinn’ [saga literature in the wider sense].

⁵ An example of the latter being Nordal’s ‘Sagalitteraturen’ which outlines the standard model only to suggest a complementary one, which classifies the sagas according to the relationship between the time of the events of their narratives and the time of those narratives being written down.

⁶ See footnote 1.

⁷ L. Lönnroth, ‘Tesen om de två kulturerna: kritiska studier i den isländska sagaskrivningens sociala förutsättningar’, *Scripta Islandica* 15 (1964), pp. 1–97.

Copenhagen, who found no references to *byskupa sögur* or *fornaldarsögur*, within those manuscripts which form the basis for the dictionary, those references to *Íslendinga saga* being to the saga of that title which forms part of *Sturlunga saga*; on the other hand there were four references to *konunga sögur* and three to *riddara sögur*, in manuscripts dating from c. 1300 to c. 1700.

Those generic labels which have their basis outside the Middle Ages would seem to derive from the first printed editions of the sagas, published at the beginning of the nineteenth century. These collect together *Íslendinga sögur*, *fornaldarsögur* and *byskupa sögur*. Interestingly, in view of the term's medieval use, the first printed edition of *konunga sögur* appeared under the title of *Fornmanna sögur* 'sagas of people from antiquity'. This variation of source within the generic labelling of the sagas points to a central dichotomy within the system as a whole, as the labels used divide between what folklorists term analytical categories and ethnic genres.⁸ The former term describes generic labels which are placed upon groups of texts from outside the society from which those texts derive—in the case of the Icelandic sagas modern (or, at least, recent) Icelanders dealing with their medieval heritage. The latter term denotes generic labels which derive from within a society, and which are recognised as having an identity within that society—as is, obviously, the case with the *riddara sögur* and *konunga sögur*.

2: The way in which the sagas have become generally classified is one which serves, seemingly unwittingly, to highlight those texts which may be supposed to be of most importance to most Icelanders—that is the *Íslendinga sögur*. Classification by subject matter allows for a concentration on that subject matter which might be thought to be of most interest. On the one hand, the *konunga sögur* are easily dismissed, as they deal with Norwegian and Danish kings—figures who, in the narratives of the *Íslendinga sögur*, are identifiable as threats to Icelanders, individually, and the Icelandic nation, as a whole. On the other, the *fornaldarsögur* are thought little of, due to their outlandish and fantastic subject-matter as well as their concentration upon events which occurred before the settlement of Iceland and which are, therefore, the shared heritage of Iceland and mainland Scandinavia.

These approaches to saga genres, which seek not only to classify the texts, but also to place them within some form of hierarchy, automatically, and, possibly, unconsciously, use the *Íslendinga sögur* as the bench-mark by which all other sagas should be measured. The *Íslendinga sögur* contain an intriguing mixture of possibilities—a mixture neatly summed up by the two sides of the,

⁸ For further discussion of these terms see Ben-Amos, Dan, 'Analytical categories and ethnic genres', in D. Ben-Amos, ed., *Folklore genres* (Austin, Ta., and London, 1976), pp. 215–43.

now largely irrelevant, free-prose / book-prose debate.⁹ On the one hand they are appealing accounts of a golden age of Icelandic society—where life existed in a commonwealth of interest, without the dominating influence of a king. On the other they are evidence of the great literary heritage which Iceland enjoys, a literary heritage which places this small country at the forefront of the production of secular prose works for a long period of time. This mixture of possibilities, mirrored by the movement from free-prose to book-prose, can be mapped directly onto the needs of Icelandic scholarship during the last century or so. Before 1918, when Iceland was still part of the Danish empire, it is possible to suggest that there was a need to remind Icelanders of their great medieval commonwealth, a need which saw the *Íslendinga sögur* taken, very much, at face value, and which saw the production of such historical works as Bogi Melsteð's *Íslendinga saga*,¹⁰ a text which presents saga heroes as real people, their lives and works chronicled in the sagas in which they appear. With the coming of independence, and the eventual return of saga manuscripts from Copenhagen to Reykjavík, the need became one of illustrating the magnificence and literary genius of the medieval society which had formed such an important part of Iceland's sense of national identity and national spirit. It was fitting that those texts which concentrated upon this particular society should receive most attention, and it is unsurprising that they did.

At this point I should say that, intrinsically, I have no real quarrel with the viewpoint that places the *Íslendinga sögur* at the forefront of saga writing. These sagas are, indeed, fascinating, rich, and intriguing. They are, generally, the longest of the sagas, provide us with the greatest heroic moments, and the most interesting characters, and are, justifiably, the jewels of saga writing. The sentiment, however, which amuses, or even annoys me, is that which seems to suggest that, because we have the *Íslendinga sögur* to compare them with, some other texts are worthless, insignificant and un-Icelandic. This is a sentiment particularly prevalent in studies produced in the years immediately following Iceland's independence.¹¹ These studies may well be dated, but they are also influential, and their power can be seen in much of the scholarship which followed them. This is evident in the concentration of scholarship on the *Íslendinga sögur*, or individual sagas from that genre, or by the representation of generic groupings within more general works such as *Old Norse-Icelandic*

⁹ Jónas Kristjánsson discusses the relevance of the book-prose / free-prose debate to modern scholarship in 'The roots of the sagas', in R. Simek, Jónas Kristjánsson and H. Bekker-Nielsen, eds, *Sagnaskemmtun* (Wien, Köln, Graz, 1986), pp. 183–200.

¹⁰ Bogi Th. Melsteð, *Íslendinga saga* 1–3 (Copenhagen, 1902–30).

¹¹ See, for example, Stefán Einarsson, *A History of Icelandic Literature* (New York, 1957) and Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *The Age of the Sturlungs. Icelandic Civilisation in the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Jóhann S. Hannesson (Ithaca, N.Y., 1953).

Literature: a Critical Guide (edited by Carol Clover and John Lindow and published in 1985, and still influential in those universities which do not have a large range of scholarship with which to compare it)¹² which limits its discussion of the *konunga sögur* to their manuscript tradition, and which lumps the *riddara sögur* and *fornaldarsögur* together in one chapter. It is even evident in a work of history by the notable book-prose scholar and *Íslenzk fornrit* editor Jón Jóhannesson, who, in his history of Iceland¹³ makes no reference to the possible validity, or otherwise, of Iceland's great works of literature, the *Íslendinga sögur*, but accepts at seeming face value much of the material about Bishop Þorlákur Þorhallsson which can be found in the A version of his saga. The *byskupa sögur* are, by this means, declassified as literature, and returned to the ranks of annal and chronicle.

Part of the tendency behind this concentration upon the *Íslendinga sögur* is one which views a movement towards overtly fictional and fantastic material as the central failure of saga writing. Some of the reasoning behind this lies in the suggestion that such a tendency bears the marks of foreign literary influence within the country. However, there remains the slightest suspicion that another strand of reasoning sees this tendency as lacking in the rigour and heroic outlook of the true Scandinavian spirit, the kind of spirit which links the sagas with their Germanic, heroic heritage, and which is celebrated in W.P. Ker's *Epic and Romance*.¹⁴ Within this framework of argument, few texts have suffered more than the later *Íslendinga sögur*—those sagas which combine an Icelandic setting with fantasy, romance, and a whole host of non-Icelandic sentiments. The later *Íslendinga sögur* are placed amongst the latest of all saga texts. They derive from the era which is marked down as the point of the decline of saga writing within medieval Iceland. This decline is linked, in its turn, to the intermingling of foreign influence within the 'national' form of the saga. This, in its turn, produces a phenomenon identified as the 'post-classical' *Íslendinga saga*, a phenomenon outlined by Stefán Einarsson: 'In the post-classical sagas ... the door was flung open to influence and borrowing from *fornaldar sögur* and the romances of chivalry'.¹⁵ This 'borrowing' took two forms. The first was the construction of new sagas 'in this spirit', the second: 'a tendency to rewrite old sagas, adorning them with incidents and motifs borrowed from the above sources, Viking exploits, breaking into burial mounds, etc. This

¹² C.J. Clover and J. Lindow, eds., *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide* (Ithaca, N.Y., and London, 1985).

¹³ Jón Jóhannesson, *Íslendinga saga* I, trans. by Haraldur Bessason as *A History of the Old Icelandic Commonwealth* (Winnipeg, 1974).

¹⁴ W.P. Ker, *Epic and Romance* (London, 1897).

¹⁵ Stefán Einarsson, *A History of Icelandic Literature* (New York, 1957), p. 150.

was most easily accomplished in episodes taking place in foreign lands
 ...¹⁶

Foreign influence marks itself by narrative events taking place outside Iceland, a factor which would seem to distance such sagas from their 'classical' fellows. Yet both the 'classical' and 'post-classical' *Íslendinga sögur* find a place within the same genre. What, then, are the determining factors in such a categorisation?

One important factor must be the lack of any other generic label to attach to such sagas. Once the qualifying adjective 'post-classical' has been appended to the title, these sagas are formed into a small, unregarded, group of otherwise quite disparate texts. However Stefán's analysis of their features showed that these sagas are identifiable because of the commingling of genre that takes place within their narratives. Either *riddara saga* or *fornaldarsaga* elements join the Icelandic narrative to produce a generic hybrid, and one that seems not wholly to belong in either group.

It may well be this generic hybridisation in the 'post-classical' *Íslendinga sögur* that accounts for the poor reception they receive at the hands of scholars such as Stefán. Behind his analysis of the sagas lies a discernible 'sub-text' of qualitative judgement, which works within the following framework:

1: There was a 'golden age' of Icelandic history, during the period just after Christianisation, which allowed saga production to flourish, in its turn.

2: Saga style deteriorated during the two centuries or so of saga production, through an adulteration of the 'classical' with fictive, and foreign, material.

3: This movement away from indigenous, towards non-Icelandic, literary styles, or genres, reflects a change within Icelandic society during the period of saga production.

These are, of course, only the views reflected in one study of the sagas, and a rather outdated one at that. They are, however, general enough in their application to form a 'backdrop' to the study of an individual text from the 'post-classical' period; and the date of their formulation has given them time to wield considerable influence. What we are embarking upon here is not a study which seeks to support or undermine Stefán's argument *per se*, but to use it to illustrate a set of common preconceptions which underly much, more recent, scholarship in the field. The vehicle for this concluding section of my discussion will be *Þorskfirðinga saga*.

Þorskfirðinga saga exists in only one medieval vellum manuscript, AM 561 4to., believed to date from around 1400. This manuscript was later copied

¹⁶ Stefán Einarsson, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

by Árni Magnússon, that paper copy being AM 495 4to. The saga, as we have it, contains two lacunæ, the first forming the latter section of chapter 10, all of chapter 11, and the first section of chapter 12, and the second occurring at the end of the saga, in chapter 20, some parts of which are illegible. In the paper copy of the manuscript (AM 495 4to.) some of the illegible lines of the older manuscript have been transcribed, presumably indicating that AM 561 4to., was somewhat easier to read at Árni Magnússon's time than today. In addition to AM 561 4to., and its copy, there exist a number of later manuscripts. In some of these the lacuna in chapters 10-12 has been filled, and the end of the saga has been expanded. These additions to the earliest manuscript are reflected in some printed editions of the saga. Of the earlier editors, Konrad Maurer,¹⁷ Kristian Kålund¹⁸ and Benedikt Sveinsson¹⁹ transcribe AM 561, 4to., additional information being given by way of appendices to the main text. However, Þorleifur Jónsson²⁰ and Valdimar Ásmundarson²¹ include material from the paper manuscripts, producing a completed saga, without lacunæ. The current standard edition (which forms part of Volume XIII of the *Íslenzk fornrit* series)²² follows AM 561, 4to., and it is this version of the saga that will be accepted as the earliest available.

The text that we now have, however, falls into the second of Stefán Einarsson's two categories of post-classical *Íslendinga sögur*: older sagas into which additional material (possibly from a foreign source) has been incorporated at a later stage. There are references made to Gull-Þórir Oddsson, and the record of his adventures written in *Þorskfirðinga saga*, in both the *Hauksbók* and the *Sturlubók* redactions of *Landnámabók*:

Þá bjó Þrándr mjóbeinn í Flatey, er Oddr skrauti ok Þórir son hans kómu út. Þeir námu land í Þorskafirði; bjó Oddr í Skógum, en Þórir fór útan ok var í hernaði; hann fekk gull mikit á Finnmörk. En er þeir kómu til Íslands, kallaði Hallr til gullsins, ok urðu þar um deilur miklar; af því gerðisk Þorskfirðinga saga.²³

Þrándr slender-legged lived in Flatey at the time when Oddr the fine and his son, Þórir, came out. They took land in Þorskafjörðr; Oddr lived in

¹⁷ K. Maurer, ed., *Die Gull-Þóris saga oder Þorskfirðinga saga* (Leipzig, 1858).

¹⁸ Kr. Kålund, ed., *Gull-Þóris saga eller Þorskfirðinga saga* (Copenhagen, 1898).

¹⁹ Benedikt Sveinsson, ed., *Þorskfirðinga saga* (Reykjavík, 1924).

²⁰ Þorleifur Jónsson, ed., *Gull-Þóris saga* (Reykjavík, 1878).

²¹ Valdimar Ásmundarson, ed., *Þorskfirðinga saga* (Reykjavík, 1924).

²² Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, eds., *Þorskfirðinga saga eða Gull-Þóris saga in Harðar saga* (Reykjavík, 1991), pp. 173–227, all further references will be to this edition of the saga, which will be abbreviated to *Þorskfirðinga saga*.

²³ Ari Þorgilsson, *Íslendingabók, Landnámabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson (Reykjavík, 1986), p. 154.

Skógar, but Þórir went abroad and went harrying; he got hold of much gold in Finnmörk. And when they came to Iceland, Hallr laid claim to the gold, and great disputes about that arose; about that Þorskfirðinga saga was made.

Furthermore, as Björn M. Ólsen²⁴ has indicated, there are areas where the texts of *Þorskfirðinga saga* and the *Hauksbók* and *Sturlubók* redactions of *Landnámabók* are similar, and in some places, identical. This, it would seem, points to the saga having existed in some form or other prior to the transcription of AM 561, 4to.

Þorskfirðinga saga, then, is a saga that has probably been altered at a period some time after its original composition. If we are to follow the model suggested by Stefán Einarsson, we may say that this alteration took the form of the addition of *fornaldarsaga* material into the main narrative. It is this addition, if such it is, that has accounted for most of the scholarly interest in the saga, as it is this aspect of the saga that has led to the view that there are links between it and the Old English poem, *Beowulf*.²⁵

The links that may, or may not, exist between these two works fall well outside the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, it is necessary to consider the episodes within *Þorskfirðinga saga* in which these fantastic events are recounted, as it is here that we may glimpse the generic blend proposed by Stefán.

Firstly, it must be said that the *fornaldarsaga* elements are sparsely scattered within the main narrative of the saga, forming a major episode at the beginning, and then a small number of references throughout the main body of the text. The major episode is in the form of an *útanferð* 'journey abroad' expedition, on the part of Þórir Oddsson, and his company of *fóstbræðr* 'foster-brothers', and occurs during chapters 2-6 of the saga. Within this episode not all that occurs can be said to be of the fantastic nature of the *fornaldarsögur*. The account begins with the journey abroad of the *fóstbræðr*, who join a ship after its steersman, Bárðr (a relation and business partner of Þórir's father, Oddr) has wintered in Iceland, and has asked for men to help him journey home again.

²⁴ Björn M. Ólsen, 'Landnáma og Gull-Þóris saga', *Aarbøger for nordisk oldkyndighed og historie* (1910), pp. 35-61.

²⁵ N.K. Chadwick, 'The Monsters and Beowulf', *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in Some Aspects of their History and Culture Presented to Bruce Dickinson*, ed. Peter Clemoes (London, 1959), pp. 171-203.

En Bárðr vill tvívegis fara ok beiddi Odd manna, svá at hann væri fær. Þar réðst til Þórir ok þeir níu fóstbræðr ok svörðust allir í fóstbræðralag...²⁶

Then Bárðr wishes to travel out and back [between Norway and Iceland], and asked Oddr for men, so that he would be able to go. Then Þórir joined in, as well as the nine sworn-brothers, and they all swore a mutual oath of brotherhood ...

This is a perfectly usual state of affairs, to be found in many other sagas and *þættir*, and continues in an unsurprising way throughout the rest of the chapter. The *fóstbræðr* travel to find Þórir's uncle, Sigmundr Hlöðvesson, at the court of Haraldr hárfagri. Sigmundr sends them away from the court, for 'er þar illt félausum mönnum', to his friend Úlfr, in Hálogaland, so that they can earn money cod-fishing.

The journey north marks the beginning of what we might properly consider fantastic about this episode. On returning from fishing, Þórir sees a strange light in the distance, and, after badgering Úlfr, learns the story of a *berserkr* Agnarr, who remains undead in a cairn, guarding a great hoard of treasure. Þórir sees the capture of this treasure as being an easier way to obtain money than cod-fishing, and so sets off, with only one companion, Ketilbjörn (who is the only one of the *fóstbræðr* with the courage to accompany him), towards the cairn.

When Þórir and Agnarr meet, it is revealed that Agnarr is Þórir's uncle. Agnarr (presumably wishing to protect his own booty) tells Þórir of a greater treasure after which he may venture.

Valr hét víkingr, er átti gull mikit; hann bar féit undir helli einn norðr við Dumshaf ok lagðist á siðan ok synir hans með honum ok urðu allir at flugdrekum.²⁷

There was a viking named Valr, who owned much gold; he carried the treasure into a certain cave in the north, near Dumbshaf, and laid himself down on it, afterwards, and so did his sons with him, and all of them became flying dragons.

Agnarr also gives them instructions as to how to obtain this treasure should they go after it.

Agnarr has already given Þórir gifts that may help him in such a quest: a tunic that will protect him from fire and weapons, gloves which have the

²⁶ *Þorskfirðinga saga*, p. 181–2.

²⁷ *Þorskfirðinga saga*, p. 185.

power to heal wounds and remove pain, a sword, helmet, belt and knife, and twenty marks of both gold and silver. So, despite attempts by Úlfr to dissuade them, the companions travel north, to Finnmörk, in order to ransack the cave.

When they get there, the instructions given to Þórir by Agnarr prove invaluable in gaining entry to the cave. Initially, it seems that only Þórir has the courage to enter the cave, but a number of his companions eventually join him, leaving only two at the top of the cliff above the cave. The exact fate of all the *föstbræðr* is uncertain, as the narrative gives only hints as to which remain alive at the end of the expedition. However, it is certain that at least two of them die, as in one place the saga relates that *einn drekinn hafði mann í munni sér*²⁸ ‘a certain dragon had a man in its mouth’, and in another that, when a dragon’s wound spills blood over one of those who were waiting at the top of the cliff (Björn Beruson), *fekk hann af því skjótan bana*²⁹ ‘he received a swift death on account of this’; his companion, Hyrningr Hallsson, receives a wounded foot from the same source.

Those who entered the cave return after three days, with a great store of treasure. Þórir first climbs up out of the cave himself, then hauls all the treasure up, and then performs the same duty for his companions. After they are all safely back at the top of the cliff, Þórir removes the pain from Hyrningr’s wound, using the gloves that Agnarr had given him.

When the time comes to share out the treasure Þórir’s companions give up all their share to him, and receive part of the gold given to him by Agnarr, in return. The companions then travel back to Úlfr, and tell him of their adventures.

The section of the narrative that concerns these particular fantastic events, forms only part of the whole *útanferð* episode. Of the rest of this part of the narrative, chapter 5 recounts an encounter the *föstbræðr* have with a band of warriors in a forest, whilst journeying through Norway and Sweden to Gautland; chapter 6 recounts a *hólmganga* episode between Þórir and a *berserkr* named Gautr, who wishes to marry the daughter of Þórir’s host against her will.

Þórir and his companions return home to Iceland during chapter 6, and here the narrative returns very much to what we would expect of an *Íslendinga saga*. In fact, if we remove the narrative of the strange events from the beginning of the saga, then its story proceeds in an entirely orthodox manner. The first chapter has introduced the main characters to us, and, from the middle of chapter 6 onwards the narrative remains within, and concerned with,

²⁸ *Þorskfirðinga saga*, p. 188.

²⁹ *Þorskfirðinga saga*, p. 188.

Iceland. Dragons, half-trolls and hidden gold are replaced with local disputes, feud, armed conflict and revenge.

The main body of this part of the narrative concerns itself with a conflict which, initially, is no concern of Þórir's at all. Whilst he has been away adventuring, a dispute has arisen over the control of the temple toll between a powerful individual named Hallr and the inhabitants of the Reykjanes region, amongst whom is Hallsteinn, the son of Þórólfr Mosterbeard, the first individual named in the saga. Upon his return, Þórir takes Hallsteinn's part in this dispute, because of Hallr's ill-treatment of his mother, who has been widowed whilst her son was away on his travels. Gradually the dispute is removed from the hands of the original parties to the quarrel, and ends with a personal conflict between Þórir, who has taken on the rôle of Hallr's champion, and Steinólfr the short. Steinólfr has no part in the original dispute, but is not well-disposed to Þórir. When Þórir marries Ingibjörg Gíslsdóttir, one of her former suitors, Þorgeirr (the son of Óláfr bellows) capitalises upon the animosity between Þórir and Steinólfr, and bribes Steinólfr to attack Þórir. Once more members of the *föstbræðralag* are killed (particularly Ketilbjörn, who is closest to Þórir); the dispute becomes one of personalities, and all sight of the original cause is lost.

All this is very domestic, and very much the type of story we would expect to find in a saga that would normally be classified as one of the *Íslendinga sögur*. This is not to say that the narrative remains entirely naturalistic throughout the rest of the saga. At certain points an element of the supernatural (especially with respect to magic) filters into the narrative, giving an aspect of *fornaldar saga*. In chapter 10, after the death of the first member of the *föstbræðralag* to die within Iceland (Már Hallvarðsson), Þórir and some of his *föstbræðr* trap one of the murderers in his house, setting a fire against the door.

... ok er fallin váru flest húsin ok menn gengu út, þeir er grið váru gefin, sá þeir Þórir, at svín tvau hlupu eins vegar frá húsunum, gyltr ok gríss. Þórir þreif einn rapt ór eldinum ok skaut logbrandinum á lær galtanum, ok brotnuðu báðir lærleggirnir, ok fell hann þegar; en er Þórir kom at, sá hann at þar var Askmaðr. Gekk Þórir af honum dauðum, en gyltrin hljóp í skóg, ok var þat Katla.³⁰

... and when most of the buildings had collapsed, and those who had been given quarter came out, Þórir and his companions saw two pigs running from the buildings on one side, a young sow and a hog. Þórir caught up one rafter from the fire, and threw the lighted brand at the thigh of the hog, and both the thigh bones broke, and he fell immediately; and when

³⁰ *Þorsfirðinga saga*, pp. 200–201.

Þórir came there he saw that it was Askmaðr. Þórir left him dead, but the sow ran into a wood, and it was Katla.

This is not the only occurrence of shape-changing in the saga. In chapter 14, Þórir comes across two women playing a game of *hnettafl*; one is said to be the daughter of Varði from Vörðufell, an ogress, and the other Kerling, the daughter of Styrkár in Barmr, a *hamhleypa*, or shape-changing witch. Furthermore, in chapter 17, an incident occurs when Styrkár and Kerling are attacking Þórir at his home which, if not explicitly an act of shape-changing, certainly contains echoes of the incident quoted above.

Þau gengu frá skipi ofanverða nótt, ok gekk Kerling fyrst í virkit, því at þegar spratt lássinn fyrir henni, er hon kom at; ok er hon kom í virkit, hljóp at henni gyltr mikil ok svá hart í fang henni, at hon fór öfug út af virkinu, ok í því hljóp upp Þuríðr drikkinn ok bað Þóri vápnast, segir, at ófriðr var kominn at bænum.³¹

They went from the ship towards the end of the night and Kerling went into the stronghold first because the lock sprang open at once before her, as she approached; and when she came into the stronghold, a huge young sow rushed at her, and so hard into her arms that she went backwards out of the stronghold, and then Þuríðr drikkinn ran up and told Þórir to get armed, saying that war had come to the farm.

Even if one does not connect the young sow with Þuríðr drikkinn, a connection which has been thought to have some validity, the image of a young sow running out of a besieged house clearly reminds the reader / listener of the earlier incident. That the reference is made obliquely is interesting, suggesting a certain amount of caution within the narrative when dealing with the unnatural; caution which might seem somewhat out of place within the fantastic world of the *fornaldarsögur*, but which is very apt within the realistic world of the *Íslendinga sögur*.

Chapter 17 contains three other references to supernatural events, all connected with Kerling Styrkársdóttir, the *hamhleypa* of chapter 14. On the way over to the encounter discussed above, she hides the attackers' ship with a *huliðshjálmr*, or concealment-helmet so that they cannot be seen crossing the fjord. Then, at the beginning of the attack, Þórir and his men have the worst of it *því at vápn þeira bitu ekki*³² 'because their weapons did not bite', until Þuríðr drikkinn notices Kerling behaving strangely.

³¹ *Þorskfirðinga saga*, p. 216.

³² *Þorskfirðinga saga*, p. 216.

... Kerling fór um völlin at húsbaki ok hafði klæðin á baki sér uppi, en niðri höfuðit, ok sá svá skýin á milli fóta sér. Þuríðr hljóp þa út af virkinu ok rann á hana ok þreif í hárit ok reif af apr hnakkafilluna. ... ok í því tók at bíta vápn Þóris, ok urðu þá mjök skeinusamir.³³

... Kerling was going across the field at the back of the house, and had the clothes on her back [pulled] up, and her head down, and was thus looking at the clouds between her legs. Þuríðr then rushed out of the stronghold and ran at her and seized hold of her head and ripped off the hair at the nape of the neck, backwards. ... and at this [point] Þórir's weapon began to bite, and they [Hallr's men] became highly prone to being wounded.

This last account, like that of the pig knocking Kerling down, is, in a somewhat morbid sense, rather comical. Although the effect of Kerling's actions is serious (causing the weapons of her opponents to be little more than useless) the method she employs to carry out her spell (if that is what it is) exposes her to ridicule. The punishment she receives is cruel and startling, but, considered in relation to the types of death and mutilation common within saga narrative, not surprising. It also serves well in retaining a shocking sense of reality within the context of the chapter. These may be characters with strange powers, but they are human underneath it all.

The last reference to shape-changing within the saga, draws both the Icelandic and *útanferð* elements together around the gold that Þórir takes from Valr's cave at the beginning of the saga. References have been made in earlier chapters to Þórir going into a berserk rage, which has links to the idea of shape-changing; at the end of the saga his reaction to the (mis-)reported death of his son is:

at hann hvarf á brott frá búi sínu, ok vissi engi maðr, hvat af honum væri orðit eðr hann kom niðr, en þat hafa menn fyrir satt, at hann hafi at dreka orðit ok hafi lagit á gullkistur sínar. Helzt þat ok lengi síðan, at menn sá dreka fljúga ofan um þeim megin frá Þórisstöðum ok Gullfors er kallaðr ok yfir fjörðinn í fjall þat, er stendr yfir bænum í Hlíð.³⁴

that he disappeared from his farm, and no one knew what might have become of him or [where] he ended up, but people hold it to be true that he became a dragon and lay down on his gold-filled coffers. It went on happening for a long time afterwards that people saw a dragon flying downwards on the side of Þórisstaðir that is called Gullfors, and across the fjord into the mountain which stands over the farm at Hlíð.

³³ *Þorskrfirðinga saga*, p. 216.

³⁴ *Þorskrfirðinga saga*, p. 226.

This section of the saga brings the narrative (at least from the gold's point of view) full circle. Yet that circle is not complete from a generic viewpoint. Whilst at the beginning of the saga the narrative is matter of fact about strange events (magical storms, dreams involving conversations with the undead, wonderful gifts, dragons and the like), at the end the style is more circumspect, leading to the suggestion that the events being related are open to question. [*P*]at hafa menn fyrir satt that Þórir turned into a dragon, and it is only *menn* in general, rather than named individuals who see a dragon flying about the neighbourhood.

There is very little else of a fantastic nature within the narrative of the saga. Interestingly, the gifts which Þórir receives from his uncle, Agnarr, and the gold he and his companions obtain during the *útanferð* episode, are scarcely mentioned once the party returns to Iceland. Þórir's great wealth, marvellous sword (Hornhjalti) and magical accoutrements would seem to be of great use to a man fighting for power within the Þorskafjörðr region. Þórir, however, remains a character of normal abilities whilst he resides in Iceland, despite his heroic status in terms of the saga as a whole.

Even Þórir's nick-name, Gull-Þórir, which provides the saga's alternative title, plays no part within the main body of the text as we have it. The title of the saga in the manuscript is *Gull-Þóris saga*, but the character remains without any addition to his name, despite the prevalence of nick-names generally within the text. The compilers of the later manuscripts which Þorleifr Jónsson used to complete the saga redress the balance slightly. In the text that fills in the first lacuna, Þórir is called Gull-Þórir once (in chapter 11), and once more in the expansion at the end of the saga (chapter 21). The title is used finally in the closing formula for the saga *Ok luku vér þar Gull-Þóris saga*, which differs from that of AM 561, 4to., which reads, *Ok lýkr þar þessi sögu frá Þorskfirðingum*.

The difference in ending highlights, almost more clearly than anything else, the uneasy relationship between the natural and the fantastic within the saga. The absence of Þórir's nick-name from the main body of the text, and its inclusion in later manuscripts of the saga would tend to support the theory that both the name, and the events which earned it, have little place within the saga as a whole. However, the name is so clearly linked with Þórir Oddsson as to be that by which he is known in both the *Sturlubók* and *Hauksbók* redactions of *Landnámabók*. It is also the name which provides the title for the earliest surviving manuscript of the saga. It is not, then, an indication of fancy on the part of a later compiler, wishing to spice up the original.

This discussion of the saga's narrative has, I hope, indicated two factors which draw me back to the opening statements of this paper, and towards its conclusion. These may be stated quite briefly:

1) It would be unfair to dismiss this saga as unworthy, in comparison with its 'Classical' brothers, as there is much of interest within the narrative, which is not, itself, poorly constructed.

2) There does, indeed, within the saga, seem to be a sense of the sceptical attitude towards the fantastic, which Einar Ól. Sveinsson hails as an inheritance from Eddaic verse.³⁵ The saga's narrative, indeed, relishes the possibilities of this scepticism, even, I may dare to suggest, to the point of pastiche.

³⁵ In Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *The Age of the Sturlungs. Icelandic Civilisation in the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Jóhann S. Hannesson (Ithaca, N.Y., 1953), pp. 124–5.

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HRAFN SVEINBJARNARSON, PILGRIM AND MARTYR

Ásdís Egilsdóttir

Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson was a wealthy *goði* or chieftain, in Vestfirðir in the far north-west of Iceland. Besides being a chieftain, he was a renowned physician and a widely-travelled pilgrim. His saga describes the feud between the protagonist Hrafn and his adversary Þorvaldr, which ended in Hrafn's execution in 1213. The saga was probably written about two decades after Hrafn's death.

Hrafns saga is a contemporary saga of thirteenth-century feuds which was incorporated in the *Sturlunga saga* compilation from around the year 1300. Besides the *Sturlunga saga* version, there is an independent version of the saga. The independent saga exists in two versions, one fuller and one abridged.

Several scholars have compared the different *Hrafns saga* versions and come to similar conclusions.¹ On the whole, the *Sturlunga saga* text is shorter; it is only about two-thirds of the length of the separate or independent saga. Occasionally the *Sturlunga saga* version has a fuller text; this occurs generally when the compiler needs to adapt his material to the *Sturlunga saga* context.

The separate saga can be seen as a mixture of hagiography and a conventional thirteenth-century Icelandic feud narrative. The *Sturlunga saga* compiler omits or shortens hagiographic, religious or supernatural material. The compiler's interests are not in the pious life of Hrafn, but in the feud between Hrafn and Þorvaldr.² In the prologue of the *Sturlunga saga* compilation, *Hrafns saga* is accordingly called the saga of Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson and Þorvaldr Snorrason.

The longer version of the independent saga is the subject of my paper.³ This saga is Hrafn's biography. In the prologue the author states that many events tend to be forgotten, stories of them do not relate what actually happened,

¹ Úlfar Bragason, 'Structure and Meaning of *Hrafns saga*', *Scandinavian Studies* (1988), pp. 267–292; Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, '*Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* and *Sturlunga saga*', *Gripla* 9 (1993), pp. 55–80; Stephen N. Tranter, *Sturlunga saga: the Role of the Creative Compiler* (Frankfurt a.M., 1987).

² Úlfar Bragason, 'Structure and Meaning', p. 287.

³ This version has been critically edited by Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* (Oxford, 1987). All my quotations from *Hrafns saga* are from this edition.

and, therefore, people believe lies and disbelieve the truth. But, he continues in a proverbial way, ‘the lie retreats when it meets the truth’.⁴

In most historical writing of the Middle Ages, hagiographic or secular, we find that the truth of the narrative is emphasised. Lying is considered sinful. Besides, what is told of God and the saints is essentially good and therefore considered true.⁵ The author of *Hrafn's saga* intends to correct misconceptions, to provide an illustration of God's suffering and patience, and to show that man has a free will which he can use for good or evil purposes.⁶

The saga text itself has an introduction in the style of the Icelandic Sagas of Icelanders with Hrafn's genealogy and description of the family's settlement. Since the days of Hrafn's great-grandfather there had been healers in the family. Their power of healing was originally acquired from St Óláfr of Norway. Hrafn's great-grandfather fought alongside King Magnús of Norway, son of St Óláfr, against the Wends.⁷ The saint appeared to his son and told him to choose twelve men of the best families to take care of the wounded. As a reward, they and their families would be granted the power of healing from God through St Óláfr's intercession.⁸

Hrafn's saga differs in many ways from other Icelandic contemporary sagas. We have descriptions of various physical and mental illnesses in miracles, but nowhere else do we have such accurate descriptions of a living physician at work as we have in *Hrafn's saga*. Guðrún P. Helgadóttir has thoroughly studied the medical knowledge of *Hrafn's saga*. She points out that all sorts of learning, including medical, came to Iceland in the early Middle Ages, and that Hrafn could have become acquainted with medical skills and medical literature on his travels.⁹

Hrafn's saga also cites more poetry than any other contemporary saga.¹⁰ It has twenty-six stanzas attributed to nine named poets, four anonymous stanzas and four dream-verses. The poetry is mainly presented in three

⁴ *Hrafn's saga*, p. 1.

⁵ Sverrir Tómasson, *Formálar íslenskra sagnaritara á miðöldum. Rannsókn bókmenntahefðar* (Reykjavík, 1988), pp. 255–6.

⁶ Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, *Hrafn's saga*, Introduction, p. xxii.

⁷ The Wends (*Vindur*) were Slavonic tribes that lived on the south Baltic coastlands.

⁸ The battle against the Wends was fought in 1043. The *Heimskringla* account of this battle, which, interestingly, does not include the dream appearance of St Óláfr, says that King Magnús examined the hands of the men in his company after the battle and chose the twelve with the softest touch. They were chosen to tend the wounded, all of them for the first time, and became great physicians. *Heimskringla* III, *Íslensk fornrit* 28, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (Reykjavík, 1951), p. 45; Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, *Hrafn's saga*, Introduction, p. xci.

⁹ Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, *Hrafn's saga*, Introduction, pp. xciii–cviii.

¹⁰ Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, *Hrafn's saga*, Introduction, p. xxxvi.

ways, firstly as ‘part-of-story verses’, belonging to the discourse of the narrative, secondly, to add a contemporary comment to events described in the saga, and thirdly, as evidence confirming the words of the saga-writer.¹¹ One of the verses describes the power of poetry:

Margr mundi sá sendir
 sókngífrs numinn lífi,
 linna vangs, fyr lǫngu,
 lundr, er nú rekr undan,
 ef brynhríðar beiði
 biti týgilig skytja,
 niðr drepr skáld und skildi
 skeggi, mál sem eggjar.

Many a man who now gets away unharmed would long ago have been deprived of life, man, if men’s big talk bit him in the same way as blades do—the poet lets his beard drop behind his shield.¹²

Several verses seem to be composed and recited in order to endure and survive the perils of the sea.¹³ Eleven verses belong to a *drápa* which the otherwise unknown poet Guðmundr Svertingsson composed, presumably not long after Hrafn’s death.¹⁴

As has already been previously mentioned, Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson was a well-travelled man. *Hrafn’s saga* tells of three journeys abroad and visits to four important pilgrim sites: Canterbury, St Giles, Rome and Santiago de Compostella, shortly before 1200. Accounts of travels abroad are frequent in medieval Icelandic literature.¹⁵ The young hero is tried and tested and receives rewards, valuable presents and praise, from kings or other men of high rank. The first account of Hrafn’s travels reads like a typical travel story:

Hrafn fór ungr brott af landi ok fekk góða virðing í öðrum lǫndum af hofðingjum, sem vitni bar um þær görsimar, er Bjarni biskup sendi honum, sonr Kolbeins hrúgu ór Orkneyjum, út hingat: þat fingrgull, er stóð eyri, ok var merktr á hrafn ok nafn hans, svá at innsigla má með. Annan hlut sendi

¹¹ On the use of verse in saga-literature, see Bjarni Einarsson, ‘On the Rôle of Verse in Saga-Literature’, *Medieval Scandinavia* 7 (1974), pp. 118–25.

¹² Translation according to Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, *Hrafn’s saga*, p. 101.

¹³ See esp. *Hrafn’s saga*, pp. 19–23.

¹⁴ Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, *Hrafn’s saga*, Introduction, p. xxxvii.

¹⁵ Joseph Harris, ‘Genre and Narrative Structure in some Íslendinga þættir’, *Scandinavian Studies* (1972), pp. 1–27, ‘Theme and Genre in some Íslendinga þættir’, *Scandinavian Studies* (1976), pp. 1–28; Lars Lönnroth, *Njáls saga. A Critical Introduction* (Berkeley, 1976), pp. 71–6; Ulfar Bragason, ‘Structure and Meaning’, pp. 274–5.

biskup honum, sððul góðan, ok inn þriðja hlut, steinklæði. Hrafn var útan einn vetr ok var á hendi tignum mǫnnum ok þótti mikils verðr, hvar sem han kom, fyrir thróttu sakir. ... Annat sumar sigldi hann út hingat ok fór til bús með fðður sínum á Eyri.

While still a young man, Hrafn travelled abroad and gained the respect of leaders in foreign countries, as is evidenced by the treasures which Bishop Bjarni Kolbeinsson of the Orkneys sent to him in Iceland. These included a signet ring of gold worth an ounce, with his name and the figure of a raven (Icel. *hrafn*), a fine saddle and dyed cloth. Hrafn dwelt abroad for one year, where he associated with noblemen and was everywhere he went held in high regard on account of his skills. ... The next summer he sailed to Iceland and returned to his father's farm at Eyri.¹⁶

But the main point of the travel stories in *Hrafn's saga* is to show Hrafn as a pious man, a good Christian. He visits pilgrim shrines, receives God's grace and presents from bishops.¹⁷ In this respect, *Hrafn's saga* resembles the legend of the Icelandic bishop-confessor St Þorlákr. Þorlákr goes abroad to study. When he returns, his hagiographer writes:

Hann var þá með sama lítillæti eðr meira, er hann kom aprt ór sinni brottferð, sem hann hafði áðr verit, en eigi hafði hann sótt skart eða þessa heims skraut sem margr sá annarr, er minni fremð ok gæfu sækir í sinni brottferð, en hann hafði sótt.

He was as humble as he had been before, possibly even more so. Although he had not sought any worldly goods and values as some men have done before, none of them brought home such good fortune and fame as he did.¹⁸

Then the hagiographer proceeds to tell his audience that it was customary for men who went abroad to seek new clothes and weapons, where they found more choice in such things. What Þorlákr brought home was learning and Christian virtues. Þorlákr is depicted as a new model, one quite different from the heroes we meet in the sagas. The men he meets on his journey are not kings and earls, they are bishops and learned men.¹⁹ Hrafn, the good Christian, is described according to the aforementioned preface of *Hrafn's saga*. His choices indicate his values; he is peaceful, righteous, generous,

¹⁶ *Hrafn's saga*, pp. 2–3. Transl. by Keneva Kunz.

¹⁷ Úlfar Bragason, 'Structure and Meaning', p. 275.

¹⁸ [*Þorláks saga*], *Byskupa sögur* II, ed. Jón Helgason, Editiones Arnarnagæanæ Series A, vol. 13 (Copenhagen, 1978), p. 183 (normalised).

¹⁹ Ásdís Egilsdóttir, 'Mannfræði Höllu biskups móður', *Sagnþing helgað Jónasi Kristjánssyni sjötugum 10. apríl 1994* (Reykjavík, 1994), pp. 11–18.

shows mercy and rejects worldly wealth and glory. Þorvaldr and his family are depicted as the opposite, ambitious and avaricious.

Hrafn makes a solemn vow to St Thomas, which leads to his pilgrimage to Canterbury, and later to St Giles and Rome. When he visits the shrine of St Giles, he prays to God that he might never receive such wealth nor renown that they would prevent him from enjoying heavenly glory. In Rome, he dedicates his life to God, the apostles and other holy men. He gives offerings to the shrines he visits and buys relics. All his life he is a model of generosity, charity and hospitality, providing free meals for guests at his home in Iceland and a free ferry service over the fjord near his farm. The power of healing enjoyed by Hrafn and his family is divine power and a gift from St Óláfr.

As Guðrún P. Helgadóttir has shown in her preface to her edition, and Margaret Cormack has demonstrated in a recent article, there are numerous hagiographic motives in *Hrafns saga*.²⁰ The hagiographic motives are, not surprisingly, mainly to be found in connection with Hrafn's death. Hrafn is attacked three times by Þorvaldr and his men. Before the first attack an initial portent appears. Hrafn is on a journey with two other men. They all see a great light, and, in addition, Hrafn sees himself in this light along with two other men. A similar scene occurs in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, written shortly before 1200 by the monk Oddr Snorrason.²¹ Both scenes remind us of the Transfiguration as told in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke.²²

In fending off the first two attacks, Hrafn is helped by the arrival of reinforcements, causing Þorvaldr to seek a truce. After Þorvaldr has attacked him for the second time, a number of men encourage Hrafn to kill Þorvaldr. Hrafn refuses, because of his respect for St James. On this occasion they were expecting Þorvaldr's arrival the night before St James's Mass. The settlement, *i.e.* redress to Hrafn for Þorvaldr's previous attack, is arranged on the feast-day itself. Hrafn invites Þorvaldr and his men to join him in a meal and takes care of his men's feet by giving them new shoes. When they depart, Þorvaldr, the man who had once lived with Hrafn like a son or brother, embraces him. This could be a reminiscence of the Last Supper, the washing of the feet and the kiss of Judas, expressing betrayal under the guise of friendship.

²⁰ Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, *Hrafns saga*, Introduction, xxi–xxx, lxi–lxxxi. See also Margaret Cormack, 'Saints and Sinners. Reflections on death in some Icelandic sagas.' *Gripla* 8 (1989), pp. 187–218.

²¹ *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar af Oddr Snorrason munk*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen, 1932), pp. 152–3.

²² Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, *Hrafns saga*, General Notes, p. 81.

The third attack, which takes place during Lent, is preceded by a sequence of saga-style omens, such as blood-rain and ghost-riders in the sky, and also by hagiographic prophecies. People see a mysterious light over the fortress near Hrafn's farm and on another occasion a pillar of light appears, reaching from heaven to the earth. St Þorlákr intervenes and frees the people whom Hrafn's enemies had bound, in order to prevent them from informing Hrafn of their whereabouts. A lost *Andreas drápa*, a poem on St Andrew, is recited to Hrafn on the sleepless night before his death, and it is said that he meditated on his *passio* after every verse. A priest and a close friend of Hrafn's dreams about the apostle's martyrdom the whole night. The reason why this poem is given this importance is that Hrafn is about to die a martyr's death and, by so doing, to follow in the apostle's footsteps.²³

Hrafn is well-prepared to meet his death. When Þorvaldr declares that Hrafn shall be executed, Hrafn prays, receives holy communion and sheds tears of repentance. Guðrún P. Helgadóttir has drawn attention to similarities between *Hrafn's saga*, *Magnúss saga* and *Thómas saga*. The death of Hrafn seems to be modelled on that of the archbishop of Canterbury; the latter meets his death on his knees, Hrafn on his knees and elbows. Both are in a position of devotion and both bodies lie as if in prayer.²⁴ The rough and barren field where Hrafn is slain becomes green and fertile the following summer. The place where St Magnús of Orkney was executed was stony and mossy, but after the martyr's death it became green, fair and smooth.²⁵

The cult of St Magnús was very popular in Iceland, especially in the north and west of the country. St Thomas of Canterbury was also among the most popular saints in medieval Iceland and versions of his legend were influential texts. The author of *Hrafn's saga* seems to have drawn upon the early translation of a life of St Thomas by Robert of Cricklade. The translator is believed to have been the priest Bergr Gunnsteinsson, who was one of

²³ The apostle's exhortation from his cross in the manuscript AM 645 has implications relevant to the saga-writer's presentation of Hrafn: 'You must not turn the meekness of the Lord into devilish violence, for the Lord showed us perfect patience when he was crucified ... Prepare yourselves to be able to overcome the terrors and torments of wicked men with patience and an untrembling heart ... Be also then prepared ... to bear temporal torments that you may be able to come to eternal joys.' Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, *Hrafn's saga*, Introduction, p. lxxxi.

²⁴ The death of St Magnús of Orkney is described in two versions of *Magnúss saga* and in *Orkneyinga saga*. The three texts agree when describing his death and the transforming of the ground where he was executed. Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, *Hrafn's saga*, Introduction, p. lxiv. See also Cormack, 'Saints and Sinners', p. 191, and Haki Antonsson in this volume.

²⁵ *Orkneyinga saga*, Íslenzk fornrit 34, ed. Finnþogi Guðmundsson (Reykjavík, 1965), pp. 106–11, 319–22, 364–9.

the Icelanders who sailed to Norway with Hrafn and bishop-elect Guðmundr Arason in 1202.²⁶

Are the hagiographic motives in *Hrafn's saga* only literary borrowings or do they have a meaning? Do they indicate merely his innocence and salvation, or was Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson perhaps even a potential saint? Numerous examples from the sagas show that people could be regarded as saints although never officially recognised as such by the church.²⁷ The fourteenth-century writer, Arngrímr Brandsson, is in no doubt when he is describing Hrafn's execution in his legend of the saintly bishop Guðmundr. In his opinion and interpretation, the pious and innocent Hrafn died a martyr's death.²⁸ The *Hrafn's saga* author seems to interpret Hrafn's death in the same way. The verb he uses to describe Hrafn's execution is *sæfa* which means 'kill as sacrifice', and has strong associations with ritual slaughter and the blood of the Lamb.²⁹

If Hrafn was looked upon as a potential saint, what kind of saint would he have become? What was the image that the saga-writer was creating?

The saga gives the impression that Hrafn, contrary to other chieftains, supported the Church's independence from secular authorities and in that way he is identified with St Thomas.³⁰

Hrafn's healing power would have easily made him a potential saint. It is obvious that people would have appealed to him in sickness and injury. The saga has an account of some of his cures, which he performs as a living physician, but the saga-writer reminds his audience that 'all true healing comes from God', and he quotes St Paul: 'Alii gratia sanitarum in eodem spiritu'.³¹ Miracle-stories frequently tell us that people tried to get help from local healers and home remedies before they invoked a saint and there was also a very fine line between folk-remedies and ecclesiastically approved methods.³² Miracle-collections emphasise divine healing, but it is clear that in practice most sick and injured people called on both the power of saints

²⁶ Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, *Hrafn's saga*, Introduction, pp. lxvii–lxxiv.

²⁷ Cormack, 'Saints and Sinners', pp. 196–205.

²⁸ [Guðmundar saga]. *Biskupasögur* II (Copenhagen, 1878), pp. 55–6.

²⁹ Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, *Hrafn's saga*, Introduction, p. xxi.

³⁰ Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, *Hrafn's saga*, Introduction, pp. lxv–lxxiv; Úlfar Bragason, 'Structure and Meaning', pp. 278, 284.

³¹ 'Some people have received the gift of healing from the mercy of the Holy Spirit.' *Hrafn's saga*, p. 6.

³² Ronald C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims. Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (London, 1995), pp. 62–3.

and on physicians or wise people. *Medicus* was a word used also for God and saints, and saints appear frequently in dreams as physicians.³³

But the ultimate power over life and death was in God's hands. *Þorláks saga helga* says that physicians are ordained by God so that 'at his will they may sometimes succeed in preventing long-lived ailing by short-lived anguish'.³⁴ The description of Hrafn's cures are not very different from the miraculous cures related in the Icelandic saints' lives. The need for divine sanction and support is obvious when Hrafn has to perform a risky operation. Hrafn seeks the opinion of priests and wise men in his household; they say that the patient will die unless he is operated on. On their verdict and with God's help Hrafn decides to operate, and before doing so he asks everyone present to chant five paternosters.³⁵

Hrafn did not accept any payment for his work. In this respect he resembles the martyrs Cosmas and Damian. The kernel of their legend is that they were twin brothers who practised medicine without charging fees. They came to be called 'the holy moneyless ones' and were invoked as patron saints of physicians.

It is also worth noting that when Hrafn visits the shrine of St Giles, patron saint of cripples and the indigent, he remembers an old saying: that God grants everyone a prayer in that holy place, and he prays that neither possessions nor renown should prevent him from attaining celestial joys. In the spirit of St Giles he sheltered and fed sick and poor people.³⁶

Hrafn had the ability to cure people but the saga-writer also seems to believe that he had power over the sea. As a real saint he could therefore have become a protector of seafarers and pilgrims, following in the footsteps of St James, whose shrine he visited in Santiago de Compostella.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries Icelanders undertook numerous pilgrimages and we have accounts of a few earlier ones. Icelandic descriptions of pilgrim routes are found in the twelfth-century *Veraldar saga* and in Abbot Nikulás's itinerary for pilgrims (*Leiðarvísir*) from c. 1150. Thirty-nine names of Icelandic pilgrims have been found in a guest-book from the monastery of Reichenau in Bodensee.³⁷ The first known Iclander to go on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella was Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson who went there shortly before 1200.

³³ Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims*, pp. 67–8.

³⁴ *Þorláks saga*, p. 217.

³⁵ Cf. Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, *Hrafn's saga*, Introduction, p. xciv.

³⁶ *Hrafn's saga*, p. 5.

³⁷ Einar Arnórsson, 'Suðurgöngur Íslendinga í fornöld', *Saga* II, p. 21; Peter Foote, *The Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle in Iceland* (London, 1959), pp. 48–9.

Many of the miracles attributed to St James took place when people were on their way to his shrine. In one of them, ferocious Saracens attacked pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostella. St James appeared and came to their rescue. The Saracens became afraid and one of them asked the apostle: 'Are you a sea-god?' The apostle answered: 'I am no sea-god, I am the servant of the God that has power over the sea'.

A bishop from Jerusalem was on his way to St James's shrine, sitting on the deck and reading psalms, when a powerful wave swept the ship and the bishop and his fellow-travellers fell overboard. St James saved them and the bishop's psalter did not even get wet.³⁸

One of *Hrafn's saga*'s most important sources is the aforementioned *drápa* of Guðmundr Svertingsson. The *drápa* is an encomium of Hrafn's saintly life and character. It tells of Hrafn's second journey abroad, his pilgrimages to holy shrines, his gift of healing, his third journey abroad with bishop-elect Guðmundr Arason on his way to Norway to be consecrated, and, finally, Þorvaldr's last attack and Hrafn's death.

The following is a short resumé of the poem:³⁹

- 1 The first stanza describes how the wise and generous Hrafn conquers the sea with his ship, and the happy landing of his men. This stanza is a part of the narrative that explains why Hrafn went to Canterbury. He and his men attempt to catch a whale but are unable to pull it towards the shore. Hrafn then invokes St Thomas and promises to give him the whale's teeth if he assists them.
- 2 Hrafn sails towards the shrine of St Thomas and travels further south. Hrafn is steadfast, and prevents misfortune.
- 3 The third stanza tells how he accomplishes his journey to visit St James, including sailing through raging storms.
- 4 Sick and injured people come to see Hrafn; he heals them and they all go away cured and trouble-free.
- 5 Guðmundr Arason invites Hrafn to voyage with him and Hrafn appears to be the one of the voyagers best suited to give good guidance on the journey.
- 6 On the voyage they are hard-pressed and at one stage see nothing but breakers and skerries.
- 7 Hrafn undertakes the task of piloting on his ship and saves both ship and men.

³⁸ *Sögur úr Skarðsbók*, pp. 127–8.

³⁹ See Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, *Hrafn's saga*, Introduction, pp. xxxvii–xxxviii.

- 8 Bishop Guðmundr has to make use of Hrafn's counsels before he can get consecration. May he ever be free of torment above the clouds.
- 9 Everyone goes rejoicing to meet Hrafn when he comes home.⁴⁰
- 10 Hostility from Hrafn's adversaries is growing and Hrafn is attacked. Hrafn, the reconciler of men, is deceived.
- 11 The last stanza depicts Hrafn as a shining example among men. He offers to die alone for his company in order to buy peace.⁴¹

Skaldic poets admittedly enjoyed describing ships and sea-journeys. It is interesting to note, however, how many stanzas from this encomium on Hrafn tell of his journeys on sea and how he rescued his people from perils at sea. *Hrafn's saga* also has a chapter devoted to his voyages and his skills as a navigator. When Hrafn accompanies bishop-elect Guðmundr on his journey to be consecrated, they are in great danger near the Hebrides. The bishop-elect asks him to pilot, but at first Hrafn humbly refuses. Guðmundr urges him to do so and Hrafn pilots with great skill and good fortune. This passage has been used in all versions of the sagas or legends of bishop Guðmundr. The narrative is shorter in the oldest version (A-version) but obviously based on the *Hrafn's saga* text, although it has more emphasis on the bishop-elect, who later came to be regarded as a saint.

Hrafn and Guðmundr were friends all their lives. When they returned from Norway the bishop gave Hrafn valuable presents, a fine horse, a cloak and a so-called sun-stone, probably some sort of crystal. According to the legends of bishop Guðmundr and *Sturlunga saga* there was a great belief in the protective power of Guðmundr's clothes. Hrafn and Guðmundr also give each other cloaks. Gifts and gift-exchange are well-known themes in saga-literature, where friendship and loyalty is often confirmed with a gift. It was believed that a gift conveyed part of the former owner's personality.⁴² A gift from a king was therefore considered of great importance and the same must have applied to presents from a saintly bishop.

After Hrafn has been slain, Þorvaldr and his men plunder his farm but fail to recognise the value and nature of the cloak and sun-stone and throw

⁴⁰ The poet seems to be using here a well-known topos from legends of confessor-bishops, showing how people receive them when they return from consecration journeys.

⁴¹ The poet probably intends to recall the words of Caiphas in John 11:49: 'it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people and that the whole nation should not perish', echoed in a fourteenth-century recension of *Thómas saga erkibiskups*. Both the *drápa* and this version of *Thómas saga* use the same word, *fríðkaup*, dying in order to buy peace. See Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, *Hrafn's saga*, Notes on the Verse, p. 113.

⁴² Anton Gurevich, 'Wealth and Gift-Bestowal among the Ancient Scandinavians', *Scandinavica* 7 (1968), pp. 126–38.

them away. The sinful Þorvaldr was unworthy of having things given to Hrafn by bishop Guðmundr. Þorvaldr later went on a pilgrimage to Rome, however, to atone for his sins.

There were signs of sanctity during Hrafn's life and around his death. His contemporaries had reason to believe that the most important signs would eventually appear. A patron saint of sailors and fishermen would have been welcome, not least in the north-west of the country, the Western Fjords, where life depends on fishing, and sailing can be extremely dangerous.

All his life, Hrafn acted as the generous, kind and helpful man every pilgrim could appreciate, housing people and feeding them, providing them with a free ferry ride and taking care of the sick. Descriptions of his life and death suggest sanctity—only the final proof, a post-mortem miracle was needed, and his contemporaries knew that one had to be patient when waiting for such a miracle to happen: it could take years.⁴³ The saga-writer associates him with the saints whose image he wishes him to reflect: St Thomas, St Giles, St James and St Andrew.

⁴³ Cormack, 'Saints and Sinners', p. 216.

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TWO TWELFTH-CENTURY MARTYRS: ST THOMAS OF CANTERBURY AND ST MAGNÚS OF ORKNEY

Haki Antonsson

I

Around 1160 Robert of Cricklade, prior of St Frideswide's in Oxford, was travelling on foot between the Sicilian towns of Catania and Syracuse. At one point, as he was walking along a beach, a ferocious wave suddenly arose and hit his legs, with the result that '...the flesh swelled immediately, and the skin was smitten with malignant redness'. In the following years the same Robert was constantly plagued by an unidentified ailment stemming from this incident. The doctors he consulted were unable to offer any relief for they claimed the illness was not to be healed by the hand of man. However, hearing rumours of the manifold miracles performed by St Thomas Becket, Robert travelled to Canterbury where he visited the saint's tomb and bathed his infected limbs in the healing water of his well. From that moment onward his suffering grew more bearable until he fully recovered.

This story, a testimony of Robert of Cricklade, appears in a miracle collection of St Thomas Becket completed by Benedict of Peterborough in 1173, three years after the archbishop's murder in Canterbury Cathedral.¹ In the same year the pope canonised Becket although his posthumous reputation was in little need of official promotion. His cult was already spreading with remarkable speed throughout Europe and by the end of the century Canterbury had become one of the main pilgrimage centres of Christendom.²

Within a decade of Becket's death an extensive corpus of writing had been composed about his life and martyrdom.³ Among the earliest biogra-

¹ *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. by J. C. Robertson, Rolls Series (London, 1876) II, pp. 97–101. I wish to express my gratitude to Marteinn Helgi Sigurðsson and Björn Weiler for reading drafts of this paper and Michael Staunton for sharing with me his extensive knowledge of the Becket corpus.

² For an overview of this process see Anne Duggan, 'The Cult of St Thomas Becket in the Thirteenth Century', in *St Thomas Cantilupe Bishop of Hereford. Essays in his Honour*, ed. by Meryl Jancey (Hereford, 1982), pp. 21–44.

³ On the Becket sources see Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c. 550 to c. 1307* (London, 1974), pp. 296–308; Frank Barlow, *Thomas Becket* (London, 1986), pp. 1–9; E. Walberg, *La Tradition hagiographique de Saint Thomas Becket avant la fin du XIIe siècle* (Paris, 1929); *Idem*, 'Affattningstiderna för och förhållandet emellan de äldsta lefnadstecknarna öfver Thomas Becket. En källkritisk undersökning', *Lunds Universitets Årsskrift* 10 (1914), pp. 1–42.

phers was Robert of Cricklade who said in the aforementioned testimony that his cure had made him an enthusiastic devotee of Thomas's sanctity. Robert demonstrated his devotion by composing a *Vita et miracula* of the saint which he completed in 1173–4. Although this work has not survived in its original form, parts of it were incorporated into a fourteenth-century Icelandic compilation of various sources on Becket, the so-called *Thómas saga II*.⁴

In *Thómas saga II* we find several passages attributed to a certain Robert of Cretel whom the Icelandic philologist Eiríkur Magnússon, in his preface to the 1875–83 Rolls series edition of the work, was the first to identify with Robert of Cricklade.⁵ E. Walberg, the great pioneer in the study of the Becket material, demonstrated that *Thómas saga II* was not the only surviving relic of Robert's lost *Vita* of St Thomas, for his work had also been used by a certain Benet, a monk of St Albans, who around 1184 completed a verse *Life* of the saint in the Anglo-Norman vernacular. Walberg came to this conclusion by comparing Benet's poem with the passages attributed to Robert in *Thómas saga II*.⁶ Moreover he also demonstrated that the D-fragment—four leaves from a codex written at the beginning of the fourteenth century—probably to a large extent derives from Robert of Cricklade's work on Thomas Becket. In addition, a fragment in the codex Stockholm Perg. fol. nr. 2 has since been shown to be drawn from a translation Robert's *Vita*.⁷ Thus remnants of Robert of Cricklade's work on St Thomas Becket is found in the composite *Thómas saga II*, Benet's *Life*, the D-fragment and Stock. Perg. fol. nr. 2.

The unsatisfactory preservation of Robert of Cricklade's Latin *Vita* is to some extent mirrored in the relative obscurity of his surviving compositions. With certainty we know he wrote five works apart from the *Vita et miracula* of Becket: *Deflorationes historiae naturalis* (a much-condensed edition of Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*); *Speculum fidei*; *De cunnubio patriarchae Jacobi*; *Lectura super Psalmos* and *Homilies in Ezechielem*.⁸ To

⁴ *Thómas saga erkibyskups. A Life of Archbishop Thomas Becket in Icelandic*. Translation, notes and glossary by Eiríkur Magnússon, Rolls Series, 2 vols (London, 1883).

⁵ *Thómas saga II*, pp. xcii–xcv. For an overview of the Becket sources in Old Norse see Alfred Jakobsen, 'Thómas saga erkibyskups', in *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Phillip Pulsiano et al. (New York & London, 1993), pp. 643–4.

⁶ E. Walberg, 'Date et source de la vie de saint Thomas de Cantobéry par Beneit, moine de Saint-Alban', *Romania. Recueil Trimestriel* 44 (1915–17), pp. 407–426. Reprinted in Walberg, *La tradition hagiographique*, pp. 9–33.

⁷ Peter Foote, 'On the Fragmentary Text concerning St Thomas Becket in Stock. Perg. fol. nr. 2', *Saga Book of the Viking Society* 15 (1961), pp. 403–450. The fragment is edited by C.R. Unger, *Heilagra manna sögur* ii (Christiania, 1877), pp. 315–20.

⁸ D.A. Callus, 'Robert v. Cricklade', in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, viii (Freiburg, 1963), p. 1338; A.B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D.*

the best of my knowledge none of these works has been edited. Another composition scholars are inclined to attribute to Robert is a *Life of St Frideswide*, the patron saint of Oxford.⁹

Robert of Cricklade's date of birth is obscure, but we know that he entered Cirencester abbey near Gloucester as a young Austin canon. There, according to his own words, he read widely in some of the prominent authors of the period such as William of Malmesbury and Peter Lombard.¹⁰ Around 1141 Robert became prior of St Frideswide's, where he supervised an impressive building programme that included a Romanesque church and cloister.¹¹ Gerald of Wales met Robert as an old man and described him '... as being learned in scriptural and other writings and not ignorant of the Hebrew language'.¹² Robert's interest in this field is shown by his attempt to acquire a work of Josephus from the Jews of Oxford which he believed contained a reference to Christ.¹³ Robert is called *magister* by Gerald of Wales; an ubiquitous term in this period, which suggests that he had some sort of academic qualification.¹⁴ Where Robert acquired his degree or precisely what learning lay behind it, is impossible to say. Although he undoubtedly participated in the intellectual life of Oxford, he certainly did not become the first chancellor of the University in 1159, as is claimed in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.¹⁵

Apart from those passages in *Thómas saga II* where Robert is referred to by name, we have no direct knowledge of what sections of this voluminous work are taken from his *Vita*. Nevertheless, a detailed reconstruction of

1500, vol. A–E (Oxford, 1957), pp. 513–4; M.L. Mistretta, 'Robert de Cricklade', in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, xii (New York, 1967), p. 530.

⁹ John Blair, 'Saint Frideswide Reconsidered', in *Oxoniensia* 52 (1982), pp. 71–127. The Incipit of *De cunubio patriachae Jacobi* can be read in F. Stegmüller, *Repertorium Biblicum Medij Aevi*, v (Madrid, 1955), pp. 153–4.

¹⁰ See R.W. Hunt, 'English Learning in the Late Twelfth Century', in *The Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 19 (fourth series 1936), pp. 31–3.

¹¹ John Blair, 'St Frideswide's Monastery: Problems and Possibilities', in *Saint Frideswide's Monastery at Oxford: Archaeological and Architectural Studies*, ed. John Blair (Great Britain, 1990), pp. 237–42.

¹² '... cum esset vir litteratus et in scripturis eruditus et Hebraicae linguae non ignorans...' *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, viii, *De Principis Instructione Liber*, ed. by G.F. Warner, *Rolls Series* (London, 1891), p. 65.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 65–6. About this curious episode see Cecil Roth, *The Jews of Medieval Oxford*, Oxford Historical Society, New Series, 9 (Oxford, 1951), p. 121.

¹⁴ Richard Southern, 'From Schools to University' in *The History of the University of Oxford*, I, *The Early Oxford Schools*, ed. by J.I. Catto (Oxford, 1984), p. 11. Robert was the only prior of St Frideswide's (otherwise not famed for its scholarly achievements) to bear this title, according to M. Dominica Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and its Background* (Oxford, 1963), p. 250.

¹⁵ *Sub.* 'Robert of Cricklade', in *Dictionary of National Biography*, xlviii, ed. Sidney Lee (London, 1896), pp. 368–9.

Robert's work was undertaken by Margaret Orme, who compared the compilation to all the relevant twelfth century accounts of Thomas Becket's *Life*.¹⁶ By identifying the Becket material that only appears in *Thómas saga II*, Orme was able to pinpoint which sections in all likelihood stemmed from the *Vita*.¹⁷

II

The oldest surviving narrative on St Magnús of Orkney (d. 1116 / 1117) is found in *Orkneyinga saga*, written in Iceland around 1200 and revised about thirty years later.¹⁸ However, of greater significance in the context of this paper is the youngest work of the Magnús corpus, *Magnúss saga lengri* (the longer *Magnúss saga*) composed in Iceland and dated on stylistic grounds to the first half of the fourteenth century.¹⁹ The author of this hagiographic work has clearly made use of *Orkneyinga saga* but in addition he had before him a Latin *Life* of St Magnús by a certain 'Master Robert' whom we are told composed this work for the feast day of Magnús's martyrdom twenty years after Magnús's death, *i.e.* around 1137.²⁰

Finnbogi Guðmundsson, the editor of *Orkneyinga saga* and the Magnús corpus in the *Íslenzk fornrit* series, made the interesting suggestion that this Master Robert was none other than Robert of Cricklade, the prior of St Frideswide and the author of the lost Becket *Vita*. Finnbogi did not back up his case with a close examination of the relevant sources but found it sufficient to highlight the parallels between *Thómas saga II* and the Magnús corpus. Some of the similarities had in fact been noted by A.B. Taylor in the

¹⁶ Margaret Orme, 'A Reconstruction of Robert of Cricklade's Vita et Miracula S. Thomae Cantuariensis', *Analecta Bollandiana* 84 (1966), pp. 379–98.

¹⁷ 'Where T [*i.e.* Tómasskinna] has material which cannot be found in its extant sources and which has neither a later date of origin than 1174 nor signs of being an editorial addition, nor contradicts information in B [*i.e.* Benet] and Stock. 2, Robert will tentatively presumed to be the source.' *Ibid.*, pp. 383–4.

¹⁸ Still fundamental to the study of the Magnús corpus is Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Sagnarritun Oddaverja*. Studia Islandica I (Reykjavík, 1937), pp. 16–39.

¹⁹ On the dating and origin of *Magnúss saga lengri* see Magnús Már Lárusson, 'Sct. Magnus Orcadensis Comes', in *Saga* 3 (1963), pp. 486–7.

²⁰ *Orkneyinga saga. Legenda de Sancto Magno. Magnúss saga skemmri. Magnús saga lengri. Helga þáttir Úlfs*, ed. by Finnbogi Guðmundsson, *Íslenzk fornrit* xxxiv (Reykjavík 1965), p. 370. *Magnúss saga lengri* will henceforth be referred to as M.s.l. On the trustworthiness of this date see Peter Foote, 'Master Robert's Prologue in Magnúss saga lengri', *Festskrift till Finn Hødnebo*, ed. by B. Eithun *et al.* (Oslo, 1989), p. 74.

introduction to his translation of *Orkneyinga saga*.²¹ The two scholars mention the similarities between the conduct of the two martyrs at the scene of execution, the detailed description of their wounds, the bad fate of their enemies and the miracles that took place at their shrines. Crucially, however, these observations were not supported by a textual comparison between the Robert of Cricklade material in *Thómas saga II* (and other relevant material originating in Robert's work) on one hand and the Master Robert's sections of M.s.l. on the other (supplemented with the short Latin *Legendum* which has Robert's *Vita* for a source). Although Finnboði and Taylor are treading an interesting path here, the parallels they mention are of such a general nature that they tell us next to nothing about a possible connection between the Magnús corpus and *Thómas saga II*. They certainly do not warrant an unqualified statement about Robert of Cricklade's authorship of the Magnús *Vita* such as we find in the most recent overview of Icelandic literature.²²

The dangers of relying exclusively on formal similarities in the search of common authorship, or even direct influence, should not be a matter of surprise to anyone remotely familiar with hagiography. As an illustration of this point one can mention the tenth- and eleventh-century hagiography on the martyred prince of Bohemia, St Wenceslas (d. 927), and the Kievan princes, the brothers Boris and Gleb (d. 1015).²³ Norman Ingham has pointed out that of the Western European passions the one on St Magnús of Orkney resembles the Russian and the Bohemian works most closely.²⁴ Another scholar has noted that the martyrdom of Magnús echoes in particular that of St Gleb; for instance, both martyrs attempt to persuade their murderer to spare their lives and, curiously, both saints are executed by cooks.²⁵ Moreover a historical connection can be found between the Orkney saint and the three Eastern European princely saints. In a Russian litany dating

²¹ *The Orkneyinga saga. A new translation with introduction and notes by A.B. Taylor* (London, 1938), p. 73.

²² Sverrir Tómasson, 'Kristnar trúarbókmenntir í óbundnu máli', in *Íslensk Bókmennta-saga I*, ed. by Vésteinn Ólason (Reykjavík, 1992), p. 457.

²³ For translation of these East European Lives see Paul Hollingsworth, *The Hagiography of Kievan Rus'* (Harvard, 1992) and for St Wenceslas see M. Kantor, *Medieval Slavic Lives of Saints and Princes. Michigan Slavic Translations 5* (Ann Arbor, 1983).

²⁴ N.W. Ingham, 'The Martyred Prince and the the Question of Slavic Cultural Continuity', in *Medieval Russian Culture*, ed. by H. Birnbaum and M.S. Flier, California Slavic Studies 12 (Berkeley / Los Angeles, 1984), pp. 31–53. See also by the same author 'The Sovereign as Martyr, East and West', *Slavic and Eastern European Journal* 17 (1973), pp. 7–8. Ingham has M.s.l. primarily in mind.

²⁵ R.M. Price, 'Boris and Gleb: Princely Martyrs and Martyrology in Kievan Russia', *Martyrs and Martyrologies*, Studies in Church History 30, ed. by D. Wood (Oxford, 1993), pp. 108–9.

from the twelfth century we find the Kievan martyrs in tandem with the Scandinavian martyrs St Óláfr, St Knútr of Odense and Magnús of Orkney.²⁶ Here, however we must step back and reflect, for unless we put forward the implausible hypothesis that Master Robert was able to read Slavic languages the possibility of a direct influence between the East European *Vitae* and the Magnús corpus can hardly be entertained.

Alternatively, the parallels between the hagiography of St Magnús and the Slavic royal martyrs can be seen to reflect a common European hagiographic tradition, associated with a specific type of princely martyr: the one betrayed by a close relative within the context of a political struggle. This tradition first emerged in Anglo-Saxon England, that hotbed of royal sanctity, where it developed between the seventh and the tenth century.²⁷ From the tenth century onwards we find a similar narrative pattern appearing in the literature on the princely martyrs from the peripheral, relatively newly converted, regions of Europe: in the Nordic countries – most clearly in the cases of St Magnús and St Knútr Lavard – and, as mentioned, in Kievan Rus' and Bohemia.²⁸ Through what channels this model was disseminated to Eastern Europe is difficult to reconstruct²⁹ but the role of English ecclesiastics in bringing it to Scandinavia is beyond doubt.³⁰

²⁶ John H. Lind, 'The Martyria of Odense and a Twelfth-Century Russian Prayer: The Question of Bohemian Influence on Russian Religious Literature', in *The Slavonic and East European Review* vol. 68 (1990), pp. 1–21. Lind's article is to some extent a response to prevailing notions regarding this Russian litany. Lind demonstrates that, in particular, Dvornik ('The Kiev State and its Relations with Western Europe', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 29 (fourth series, 1947), pp. 38–9) is wrong in his identification of Western saints such as St Óláfr (who he thought was Óláfr Tryggvason) and St Magnús (who he assumed was the German abbot Magnus of Fuss). The appearance of these Western European saints in this litany has been interpreted in the context of Bohemian influence. Lind on the other hand points out that the Kievan principality had considerable ties (especially through dynastic marriages) with Scandinavia well into the twelfth century. Strangely Lind does not refer to N.W. Ingham's study, 'The Litany of Saints in "Molitva sv. Trioce"', in *Studies presented to Professor Roman Jakobsson by his Students*, ed. by C.E. Gribble (Cambridge MA, 1968), pp. 121–36.

²⁷ Christine E. Fell, 'Edward King and Martyr and the Anglo-Saxon Hagiographic Tradition', in *Ethelred the Unready: Papers from the Millenary Conference*, ed. by David Hill, BAR Brit. Ser. 59 (Oxford, 1978), pp. 1–13. On the cult of these betrayed martyrs see David Rollason, 'The Cults of Murdered Royal Saints', in *Anglo-Saxon England* 11 (1983), pp. 1–22.

²⁸ On the significance of the centre-periphery model in the development of royal sanctity see Gábor Klaniczay, 'From Sacral Kingship to Self-Representation; Hungarian and European Royal Saints', *The Uses of Supernatural Power: The Transformation of Popular Religion in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, tr. S. Singermann, ed. K. Margolis (New York, 1990), pp. 79–94.

²⁹ Ingham, *The Sovereign as Martyr*, pp. 11–12.

³⁰ Thus a certain Ælnoth, an English monk resident in Odense, wrote (ca. 1120) a curious work entitled *Gesta Swenomagni et filiorum eius et Passio gloriosissimi Canuti regis et martyris, Vitae Sanctorum Danorum*, ed. by M.C. Gertz (København, 1918–22), pp. 77–136.

This brief digression should indicate how fraught with difficulties it is to claim a common authorship in the field of hagiography by concentrating exclusively on general similarities.³¹ If a connection between two works of this genre is to be made the '... similarity of situation and an audible verbal echo...' must surely be the ideal criterion.³² Only when a number of similarities and verbal echoes have been noted can we begin to assess the possibility of a direct literary influence or common authorship.

The philological dangers involved in the process of comparing the works by the two Roberts can hardly be underestimated. Most obviously we are dealing with Lives written by Englishmen that are incompletely preserved in Icelandic translations. There is a general consensus that the priest Bergur Gunnsteinsson (d. 1211) was the translator of Robert of Cricklade's *Vita* of Thomas Becket into Icelandic. It was this translation, perhaps in a modified form, which was incorporated, along with other material on the Canterbury saint, into *Thómas saga II*. The composition of that saga has been attributed by Stefán Karlsson to Arngrímur Brandsson, who wrote a *Life* of Bishop Guðmundr Arason around the middle of the fourteenth century (1343 or later).³³ Peter Hallberg has on the other hand argued that abbot Bergur Snorrason was responsible for both *Thómas saga II* and M.s.l.³⁴ However that may be, it is clear that the authors of M.s.l. and *Thómas saga II* were members of a small circle of fourteenth-century Icelandic hagiographers whose aim was to make existing sources more in tune with prevailing religious concerns and stylistic trends.³⁵

Another Englishman, Robert of Ely, wrote a *Life* of Knútr Lavard, *ibid.*, pp. 233–41. On the English influence on the Scandinavian royal cults in general see E. Hoffmann, *Die heiligen Könige bei den Angelsachsen und den skandinavischen Völkern. Königsheiliger und Königshaus. Quellen und Forschungen Zur Geschichte Schleswig-Holsteins*, Band 69 (Neumünster, 1975). For some reason Hoffmann does not include St Magnús in his study.

³¹ A connection between the Magnús section in *Orkneyinga saga* and the death scene of St Waltheof, as described by Orderic Vitalis in his *Ecclesiastical History*, has been suggested by Judith Jesch 'England and Orkneyinga Saga', in *The Viking Age in Caithness, Orkney and the North Atlantic. Select papers from the Eleventh Viking Congress, Thurso and Kirkwall 22. August–1. September*, ed. by C. Batey *et al.* (Edinburgh, 1993), pp. 227–8.

³² *Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, ed. by Guðrún P. Helgadóttir (Oxford, 1987), p. lxvi.

³³ Stefán Karlsson, 'Icelandic Lives of Thomas á Becket: Questions of Authorship', in *Proceedings of the First International Saga Conference* (1973), pp. 229–39.

³⁴ Peter Hallberg, *Stilsignalement och författarskap i norrön sagalitteratur. Synpunkter och exempel*, Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis. Nordistica Gothoburgensia (Gothenburg, 1968), pp. 144–51; *Idem*, 'Om Magnúss saga helga', *Einarsbók. Afmæliskeðja til Einars Ól. Sveinssonar* (Reykjavík, 1969), pp. 59–70.

³⁵ See Sverrir Tómasson, 'Norðlenski Benediktínaskólinn', *The Sixth International Saga Conference. Workshop Papers II* (1985), pp. 1009–1020. Thus one of the intentions of the compiler of *Thómas saga II* is to '... rid the text of anything that might be held to disparage saint or church or give credit to Thomas's enemies. In his work there are many signs of extensive revision of style and arrangement.' Foote, *On the Fragmentary Text*, p. 445.

III

Apart from the fact that both were considered martyrs soon after their death there is, at first glance, not much to link St Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, with St Magnús Erlendsson, earl of Orkney. Where Thomas died as the incumbent of the second most important office in the British Isles, and in defence of ecclesiastical rights, Magnús's murder by his co-earl and cousin Hákon Pálsson was a climax to a power struggle between two rival factions within the Orkney earldom.³⁶ The locations of their deaths are likewise worlds apart: Thomas was slain in the cathedral of Canterbury, the centre of Christianity in the British Isles, while Magnús met his fate on an insignificant island at, what must have seemed to most Englishmen, the northernmost edge of the world. One can only assume that these remote islands north of the Scottish mainland, colonised by unruly Northmen, were seen as hardly belonging to the Christian world. Around the time of Magnús's death William of Malmesbury (putting words into the mouth of Urban II on the eve of the first crusade) wrote in his *De gestis regum Anglorum*: '...for who will give the name of Christians to those barbarians living on the icy ocean as if they were beasts'.³⁷

Following the prologue by the Icelandic author of M.s.l., the prologue of Master Robert is quoted at length: 'That God's christianity is the tabernacle that Moses made for God's service, denotes its worth as a shelter and support against the onslaught of his foes. Gold denotes wit and wisdom; silver chastity; gem-stones the miracles of holy men; goatshair the repentance of

³⁶ On the political background see Barbara E. Crawford, 'The Cult of St Magnus in Shetland', *Essays in Shetland History. Heiðursrit to T.M.Y. Manson 1904, 9th February 1984*, ed. by B.E. Crawford (Lerwick, 1984), 65–81.

³⁷ '... nam omnem illam barbariem quae in remotis insulis glaciale frequenter oceanum, quia more belluino vicitat, christianam quis dixerit?' William of Malmesbury, *De gestis regum Anglorum*, ed. by W. Stubbs, *Rolls Series* (London, 1889) ii, p. 395. The peripheral, less developed, regions of Europe such as Eastern Europe, Scandinavia and the Celtic fringe were frequently portrayed as being pagan or semi-pagan by medieval men of letters. See Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales 1146–1223* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 268–70. The Icelandic prologue to M.s.l. should be seen within this context. Because of the indigenous Nordic saints, we are told '... it may be seen that we are not far off from God's mercy, though we be far off from other peoples in our abode in the world...' *Icelandic Sagas*, iii, 'The Orkneyingers' Saga', tr. G.W. Dasent, *Rolls Series* (1894), p. 239. Henceforth this translation will be referred to as M.s.l. (*Rolls Series*). A comparable thought is expressed by Master Robert: 'He [*i.e.* St Magnus] drove away the throne of the lordship of the Devil out of the northern air of the world, and established in its stead the tabernacle of Almighty God.' M.s.l., p. 370; M.s.l. (*Rolls Series*), p. 269.

sin; red buckskin martyrdom.³⁸ Peter Foote has drawn attention to the parallels between this preface and the prologue of William of Canterbury's *Passio et miracula* of St Thomas, written in 1173-4.³⁹ In both works the same passage from St Jerome's introduction to the Book of Samuel and the Book of Kings is quoted and commented on. Although Foote admits that the authors might have made use of Jerome independently he nevertheless finds it likely that Robert had before him William's *Passio* when he composed his work on St Magnús. In either case there is a good case for assuming that Robert of Cricklade lifted some material from William's *Passio* when he wrote his work on the Canterbury saint.⁴⁰

Although violent death is the basis of Becket's and Magnús's sanctity their early years are described in laudatory terms. Both are conscientious and obedient boys who, in contrast to their peers, find fulfilment in religious meditation and the study of holy writing.⁴¹ It seems Robert of Cricklade was more knowledgeable of, or more interested in, Thomas's youth than the other biographers. He alone, for instance, includes a description of Thomas's Parisian years, and where other writers claim that he neglected his studies in this period, Robert stresses his diligence and tells that he did not participate in the less than pious student life in Paris. In a passage peculiar to *Thómas saga II* we read that his youth was marked by the devotion he showed to the Virgin Mary, who in turn...

... lagði honum ... svá blíðan hug, at þegar sem hann var í æskutíma kjöri hon hann sjálf til hins hæsta kennimanns, á nokkurra líka mynd ok lesit er af hinum helga Davíð, at Guð Dróttinn kjöri hann til konungs yfir Israels lýð, ok smurði hann fyrir hendr Samúelis þegar í barndómi, sem hann var smásveinn í sauðageymslu.⁴²

... set such a loving heart on him, that already when he was still in the years of youth she herself chose him to be the highest among teachers, which resembles after a fashion what is read of the holy David that the lord chose him to be king over Israel, and anointed him by the hands of Samuel, even in his childhood, already when he was only but a little swain a-shepherding.⁴³

³⁸ M.s.l., 336; M.s.l. (Rolls Series), p. 241.

³⁹ Foote, *Master Robert's Prologue*, pp. 65-82.

⁴⁰ *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, p. lxix.

⁴¹ M.s.l., pp. 338-9. On Thomas's childhood in Robert's *Vita*, see Orme, *A Reconstruction*, p. 384.

⁴² *Thómas saga*, I, p. 19.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

This comparison of Thomas to king David can be interpreted on at least two levels. Most clearly it refers to the archbishop's relatively humble origin. In fact Thomas himself, when taunted for his lack of noble background, wrote in a letter to his bishops that the '... holy David became from a shepherd the king of Israel.'⁴⁴ In addition, the words underline Thomas's mission in life: just as God chose to extend his grace to David and mark him out for kingship at an early age, thus Becket is chosen from birth to be a vessel of sanctity. In M.s.l. a similar mode of thought appears in a passage clearly derived from Master Robert's work: Joseph was made from slave to counsellor and '... the shepherd boy, David, the greatest king over all the tribes of Israel'.⁴⁵ The question whether the use of this biblical allusion by the two Roberts is a coincidence must be left open. The role of king David in the hagiography on the two martyrs will be discussed later in this paper.

We can detect a certain ambiguity in the portrayal of Becket and Magnús before they assume the roles of archbishop and earl respectively. Concerning the latter, we read that his early life was not altogether exemplary for he participated in viking-style raids and other activities not befitting a saint. Master Robert asks why God permitted '...his servant to lust after robbery and murder, and to be defiled with such manifold sins and misdeeds?'⁴⁶ The turning point for Magnús is nevertheless close at hand. Having refused to raid England with the Norwegian king, and deserted the royal army, Magnús stays at the court of Malcolm III, the king of the Scots, and with 'a certain bishop of Wales':

Ok sem hann hafði verit slíka stund í hirð Skotakonungs sem honum líkaði, sæmðr af konunginum gjöfum ok göfgu föruneysi, fór hann á Katanes ok var þar öllum virðulega tekinn, hirtr ok haldinn ok þegar kosinn ok tignaðr jarls nafni, vinsæll ok virðulegr öllum guðs vinum. Ok því næst án dvöl gerðist inn heilagi Magnús jarl Paulus af Saulo, predikari af manndrápsmanni, ok hefndi hann þat á sjálfum sér, þat er hann hafði illa lifað.⁴⁷

And when he had been such time at the court of the Scot-king as liked him, honoured of the king with gifts and noble company, he fared to Caithness where he was worthily received of all, kept and cared for, and at once chosen and honoured with the title 'earl', beloved and worshipful to all the friends of God. And next to that without tarrying the saint earl

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 403.

⁴⁵ M.s.l., p. 374 & *Thómas saga*, I, pp. 48–9.

⁴⁶ M.s.l. (Roll Series), p. 247. 'Hví leyfði allsvaldandi guð þenna sinn svein láta gírnast rán ok manndráp ok saugast af svá margföldum syndum ok misverkum?' M.s.l., p. 344.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 349.

Magnús became Paul out of Saul, a preacher out of a manslayer, and he avenged it on himself that he had lived an ill life.⁴⁸

The key words here are ‘became Paul out of Saul’ expressing a sudden conversion from the life of warfare to one of Christian virtues and self sacrifice; a conversion that coincides with Magnús’ reception of the title of earl from the people of Caithness.

Although biographers portrayed Thomas Becket before he became archbishop as a man of Christian morals the fact that he had up to that time conducted his life in the manner of a layman was impossible to gloss over. Becket had not even received priestly orders when Henry II chose him for this highest ecclesiastical office in England. His military career was an additional source of embarrassment. Becket’s behaviour was perhaps acceptable from a ‘secular’ clerk, as Becket undeniably was,⁴⁹ but from an archbishop, not to mention a canonised saint, it was clearly not.

In one passage of *Thómas saga II*, Bishop Henry of Winchester speaks the following words to Thomas Becket as the latter hesitates over accepting the archbishopric:

‘Son minn sætasti,’ sagði hann, ‘lát þér eigi hrygðar afla þetta efni, því at héðan í frá muntu fagrliga bæta, ef þú hefir nokkut brotið. Leið þér til minnis, hversu hann gerði Paulus, hann var fyrri mótstöðumaðr Guðs kristni, enn síðan mestr uppheldismaðr í orði ok eftirdæmi, ok dýrkaði hana at lyktum með sínu banablóði. Gefi þat Guð Dróttinn, at þú líkist honum á götu lífs ok réttlætis.’⁵⁰

‘Sweetest son mine’ said he, ‘let this matter cause no grief to thee; for henceforth thou wilt boot in a fair wise for aught wherein thou mayst have trespassed already. Call to mind how he did, Paul, who aforetime withstood the Church of God but was sithence the greatest prop of her in word and example, and glorified her at last in his blood at his death. May the Lord God grant that thou be like unto him in the path of life and righteousness.’⁵¹

We can be reasonably certain that this scene was included in Robert of Cricklade’s *Vita* of St Thomas as it is peculiar to *Thómas saga II*, the Stockholm fragment and, interestingly, Guernes’s verse *Life* completed in 1174.⁵²

⁴⁸ M.s.l. (Rolls Series), p. 251.

⁴⁹ Frank Barlow, *Thomas Becket*, pp. 58–9.

⁵⁰ *Thómas saga*, I, pp. 80–3.

⁵¹ *Thómas saga*, I, pp. 81–3.

⁵² Unger, *Heilagra manna sögur*, p. 318; *La Vie de Saint Thomas par Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence. Poème historique du XII siècle (1172–117)*, ed. E. Walberg (Lund, 1922), lines 495 ff.. The connection between Guernes and Robert’s work has not been made clear to

There are parallels worthy of attention when we compare Henry's speech to the St Paul reference in M.s.l. Both passages reflect Magnús's and Thomas's repentance of, and conversion from, the worldly life they had lived up to that point in time. Both saints, it is implied, can atone for their former sins by the martyrdom ahead and from this time onwards they excel in the virtues befitting a saint. The echoes between the following sentences are worthy of note: *...hefndi hann þat á sjálfum sér; þat er hann hafði illa lifað...* ('...and he avenged on himself that which he had lived ill...'), says M.s.l., *...héðan í frá muntu fagrliga bæta ef þú hefur nokkut brotið...* ('...henceforth you shall make amends for whatever you have done wrong...'), writes Robert of Cricklade. The reference to Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus may well be a medieval formula applied in circumstances of this nature. It is, however, a point of some interest that the transformation takes place at the point when the saints assume the offices of earl and archbishop.

Like many medieval royal or princely saints, Earl Magnús is presented in the role of *rex iustus*, a just ruler, who expels pirates from his realm, supports the Christian religion and rules his people, high and low, with a strict but fair hand.⁵³ In *Thómas saga II* we find the following passage:

Enn höfðingjum ok stórmenni valdi hann opinberar gjafir. Af slíku, sem von var, unnu honum fátækir sem sínum feðr, enn höfðingar virðu hann sem sér jafnan, ok óttuðust hann sem sinn formann.⁵⁴

But to lords and great men he chose to give his gifts openly. For these things, as might be looked for, the poor loved him, even as a father, but lords held him in honour as their equal, and revered him as their superior.

In M.s.l.:

Hann var örr af fé ok stórgjöfum ok stórgjöfull við höfðingja; hann veitti hversdagliga mikla hjálp fátækum mönnum fyrir guðs ást. Refsaði hann mjök herrán ok stuldi, lét drepa víkinga ok illgjörðamenn, svá ríka sem fátæka. ... Margir ágætir váru þeir hans mannskostir, er hann sýndi sjálfum guði, en leyndi mennina.⁵⁵

He was generous of money, and open-handed to chiefs, he gave daily great money and help to poor men for God's love. He chastised much plunder and stealing, he let vikings and ill-doers be slain, as well powerful

the best of my knowledge. Guernes relied heavily on Edward Grim and he was also acquainted with William of Canterbury's *Vita*. See Walberg, *Tradition*, pp. 92–134.

⁵³ See Peter Foote, 'Observations on *Orkneyinga saga*', in *St Magnus Cathedral and Orkney's Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, ed. by B.E. Crawford (Aberdeen, 1988), p. 202.

⁵⁴ *Thómas saga*, I, pp. 56–7. Also in Unger, *Heilagra manna sögur*, II, p. 316.

⁵⁵ M.s.l., pp. 352–3.

as poor. ... Many and famous were his virtues which he showed to God himself but hid from men.⁵⁶

The last sentence brings to mind *Thómas saga's* description of Becket's generosity towards the poor:

Hér með lagði herra Thómas þá mildi til fátækra manna ok útlendra at úspart huggði hann þeira vesaldir með fégjöfum, þótt þat væri leynt fyrir alþýðu.⁵⁷

Into this lord Thomas added such bounty to needy folk and foreigners, that he yielded them in their hardships unstinted comfort in gifts of money although it were hidden from knowledge of the multitude.⁵⁸

General and particular similarities can be noted in the build up to the scenes of martyrdom in Canterbury Cathedral and on Egilsay. Both saints, for instance, are slandered in the presence of their main enemy, Hákon Pálsson and Henry II, and in both cases the vilification is instrumental in bringing about their violent death. In the case of Becket the theme of evil counselling appears in a number of his Lives including, as we shall see, Robert of Cricklade's.⁵⁹

The suggestion has been made that Robert was sympathetic to Henry's cause or, alternatively, that he was indebted to him for some reason.⁶⁰ It is known, for instance, that he dedicated his translation of Pliny the Elder to the king. However, such speculation must be modified in light of the following passage which appears in the collection of homilies on Ezechiel which Robert wrote within a year of Becket's death:

What shall I say of Thomas, glorious bishop and martyr, who merited the crown of martyrdom in our time? He neither feared the king's threats nor yielded to the promise of worldly honour, but despised them all in the fullness of his Christian charity, and offered himself up as a sacrifice to Christ for the liberty of the Church.⁶¹

⁵⁶ M.s.l. (Rolls Series), p. 254,

⁵⁷ *Thómas saga*, I, pp. 54–5.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 55–57.

⁵⁹ See for example the *Life* by William fitzStephen (1173–4). *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. J.C. Craigie, Rolls Series (London, 1878), III, pp. 41–2.

⁶⁰ Foote, *On the Fragmentary Text*, p. 429.

⁶¹ 'Quid dicam de gloriosissimo martyre et pontifice Thoma, qui in nostris temporibus martirii coronam promeruit, qui regis minas non timuit nec temporalium honorum blandimentis cessit? Caritate enim Christi repletus omnia despexit et seipsum Christo pro libertate ecclesie hostium optulit.' Beryl Smalley, *The Becket Conflict and the Schools* (Oxford, 1973), p. 198.

Judging from these words Robert of Cricklade, at least at that point in time, supported the principles which Thomas Becket so strenuously championed. Nevertheless, Robert's attitude towards the king is somewhat ambivalent for, judging from *Thómas saga II*, it comes through that he did not consider Henry to be Becket's only enemy or, for that matter, his most important one. This honour fell to the prominent English ecclesiastics who failed to support the archbishop and finally betrayed him in the hour of need. The following passage of *Thómas saga II* is derived from Robert of Cricklade:

Ok er þat finna gamlir úvinir erkibyskups, draga þeir sig framm úr skugganum, ok afklæða með öllu þá bölvuðu öfund ok illgirninni, er þeir höfðu lengi borit í sínu brjósti. ... Sumir rægja hann fyrir eina saman ílsku sinnar úlýðsku. Má hér til nefna þrjá byskupa er fremstir ganga, Rodgeirr af Jork, Gillibert af Lundúnum, ok Jocelin af Sarisber.⁶²

Now the old enemies of the archbishop crawl out of the shadow and uncover to the full the accursed envy and malice which they had long borne in their breast. ... Some backbite him out of the mere wickedness of their illnature. As foremost leaders in these matters three bishops can be named here, Roger of York, Gilbert of London and Jocelin of Salisbury.⁶³

In M.s.l. slandering and sowing of ill is likewise in the foreground. Here the slandering subordinates are not members of the ecclesiastical establishment, but Hákon's followers:

Tveir menn váru þeir með Hákon jarli, er til eru nefndir, at einna verst gengu á millum þeira frænda; hét annarr Sigurðr, en annarr Sighvatr sokki. ... Margir váru þeir aðrir, er illan hlut áttu í þeim málum, ok váru þeir allir með Hákon, því at heilagr Magnús vildi enga rógsmenn halda í sinni hirð.⁶⁴

Two men were they with earl Hákon who are named as having been the worst of all in going between those kinsmen; the one's name was Sigurd; and the other Sighvat sock. ... There were many others who had a bad share in this matter, and these were all with Hacon, for saint Magnús would not keep any backbiters in his following.⁶⁵

⁶² *Thómas saga*, I, p. 176. *Heilagra manna sögur*, II, p. 319.

⁶³ *Thómas saga*, I, p. 177.

⁶⁴ M.s.l., p. 361

⁶⁵ M.s.l. (Rolls Series), p. 261.

Admittedly it is impossible to say with certainty whether this passage derives from Robert's *Vita*. However, from the *Legenda* of St Magnús we know that the theme of evil counselling featured in his *Life*.⁶⁶

As Becket's and Magnús's posthumous reputation rested almost exclusively on the way they died, it is not surprising that their martyrdoms are described in detail. The early biographers of Becket tend to give slightly different accounts of what happened on the fateful day.⁶⁷ The same in fact applies to the two fundamental testimonies of the Magnús corpus. Thus in *Orkneyinga saga* we are told that Hákon Pálsson attended the Egilsay peace conference with overwhelming force although the earls had agreed on a small retinue. Nevertheless, in spite of being heavily outnumbered, Magnús refused to flee the danger. The night before his death Magnús stayed in a local church where he ordered a mass to be performed. In the morning, when Hákon and his henchmen burst into the church, Magnús was not to be found but shortly afterwards he gave himself up of his own accord.⁶⁸ By leaving the church, a place of safe refuge, Earl Magnús shows his trusting attitude.

In M.s.l. the scenario is somewhat different. In this work Magnús does not leave the church and he is captured there by Hákon's men following morning mass. There is a notable emphasis on the fact that Hákon and his companions break the sanctuary of the church:

En Hákon jarl, er þenna tíma var firrdr allri gudhræðslu ok ástsemd, svívirðandi privilegia kirkjunnar, óttaðist eigi inn at ganga i heilaga kirkju, raskandi sva frið hennar ok frelsi, at hann sýndi sinn glæp því grimmilegar sem hann framdi í helgara stað.⁶⁹

But earl Hacon, who at that time was banished from all fear and love of God, dishonouring the privileges of the Church, was not afraid to go into the holy church violating thus her peace and freedom, so that he showed his wickedness all the more grimly that he did it in a holier place.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ 'Satellites autem sui in necem beati Magni conspirantes, sed simulationis nube palliantes, cum beato viro pacifice in dolo locuti sunt ut beatus Magnus et Hako statuto die in quadam insula, quæ vocatur Egelesio, cum pari numero hominum et armorum convenirent.' *Legenda*, p. 306.

⁶⁷ On the presentation of the martyrdom in the early hagiography on Becket see Jennifer O'Reilly, 'The Double Martyrdom of Thomas Becket: Hagiography and History', in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 7 (1985), especially p. 189–97; *Idem*, 'Candidus et Rubicundus': An Image of Martyrdom in the 'Lives' of Thomas Becket', *Analecta Bollandi-ana* 69 (1981), pp. 303–14.

⁶⁸ *Orkneyinga saga*, pp. 107–9.

⁶⁹ M.s.l., 365.

⁷⁰ M.s.l. (Rolls Series), 264–5.

Magnús's arrest is presented here as a violation of ecclesiastical independence and privileges; Hákon is the transgressor who pays no heed to the sacrosanct domain of the Church. This episode in M.s.l. can not fail to evoke the most symbolically charged violation of the same ideals which the medieval world had witnessed; the killing of Thomas Becket before the altar of Canterbury Cathedral. Although this outburst of ecclesiastical outrage in M.s.l. could be the work of the Icelandic author, it is clear that in Master Robert's work the four servants of Hákon rushed into the church in order to capture Magnús.⁷¹

Moreover only in M.s.l. do we find a reference to the four men Hákon sends to capture Magnús:

bessir fjórir, er heldr megu kallast af sínum grimmeik inir skæðustu vargar en skynsamir menn, jafnan þyrstandi til blóðs úthellingar, hlupu inn í kirkjuna mjök svá at lokinni messu.⁷²

These four, who may rather be called for their cruelty the most harmful wolves than reasonable men, always thirsting for the outshedding of blood, rushed into the church just about the end of the mass.⁷³

This bloodthirsty quartet brings to mind the four knights who plot against and eventually murder Thomas Becket. The number of the attackers is commented on by William of Canterbury, who draws a parallel with the four soldiers of Christ's passion.⁷⁴ Indeed, the presentation of two of them in *Thómas saga II* echoes the reference to wild beasts in M.s.l. Thus Reginald fitzUrse is *dýrum líkr í sínum grimmeik...*,⁷⁵ and Richard le Bret ... *nú vorðinn verr enn skynlauss af skynsamri skepnu...*⁷⁶ Later, at the scene of the murder, *Thómas saga II*, possibly following here Robert, refers to the knight's assault on Thomas as that of ... *skæðir vargar á mildan hirði*.⁷⁷ Interestingly, the same words *skæðir vargar* are also used to describe Hákon's henchmen. Of course the fact that the murderers are compared to *vargar* or 'wolves' is not surprising in light of the fact that martyrs are traditionally likened to sacrificial lambs.

Another comparison, however, is more difficult to explain in this fashion. Master Robert refers to Hákon's underlings as *sonum Belíals, vándum*

⁷¹ 'Irruentibus igitur in ecclesiam Domini apparitoribus...' *Legenda*, 307.

⁷² M.s.l., p. 366.

⁷³ M.s.l. (Rolls Series), p. 265.

⁷⁴ *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket*, I, p. 2.

⁷⁵ '... like unto beasts in his cruelty...' *Thómas saga*, I, pp. 514–5.

⁷⁶ '...having changed from a rational being to one worse than a beast...' *Ibid.*, 515–6. I have not found a direct parallel here in the Becket biographies.

⁷⁷ *Thómas saga*, I, p. 542. '...wild wolves on the mild shepherd'.

*illvirkjum, ok sonum hins dáliga Dohet, er æ og æ illt unnu, frá því er þeir fæddust af móðurkviði.*⁷⁸ The reference to Belial is reasonably clear as the name is generally applied to people in the Bible ‘...who behave in a dissolute manner, give false testimony, or hatch infamous plots.’⁷⁹ The reference to Dohet (Doech), the trusted servant of king Saul, is on the other hand perhaps less well known, although he was seen in Christian, and in fact Jewish, tradition as the archetypal slanderer.⁸⁰ Interestingly, William of Canterbury compares the four knights to the sons of Belial and the adherents of Dohet as they plan their assault on the archbishop.⁸¹ The same biblical reference is applied to the attackers in the so-called *Anonymous II*, a work written in 1172–73 and in all likelihood known by William of Canterbury.⁸² It seems unlikely, although by no means impossible, that the mention of ‘Belial and Dohet’ by Master Robert, William of Canterbury and the *Anonymous II* is a coincidence. Again the similarity of circumstances could have induced the authors to apply an identical comparison. Nevertheless, keeping in mind the relative obscurity of the reference, this solution seems somewhat unlikely. Peter Foote’s suggestion that William of Canterbury’s *Life* influenced Master Robert should also be taken into account here.⁸³

Furthermore, we know that William of Canterbury, *Anonymous II* and Robert of Cricklade all made use of John of Salisbury’s epistolary account of Thomas’s martyrdom written in 1171.⁸⁴ All three were presumably also acquainted with John of Salisbury’s well known and widely circulated cor-

⁷⁸ M.s.l., p. 358. ‘...the sons of Belial, wicked ill-doers, and sons of the bad Dohet who from the day they were born from their mother’s womb did do evil.’ M.s.l. (Rolls Series), p. 259. This comparison undoubtedly figured in the Latin *Vita* for it also appears in the *Legenda*: ‘...prædictus Hako cum septem vel octo navibus plenis, viris Belial et sanguinem sientibus sibi associatis, prædictam insulam applicuit.’ *Legenda*, p. 306.

⁷⁹ Sub. Belial in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ii (Jerusalem, 1971), pp. 419–20. See the biblical references given there.

⁸⁰ Luis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, iv, *Bible Times and Characters from Joshua and Esther* (Philadelphia, 1946), p. 936. The Íslenzk fornrit editor of the saga did not know what to make of this biblical name, *Orkneyinga saga*, p. 358. His identity was pointed out by Peter Foote, *Master Robert’s Prologue*, p. 75 (note 4).

⁸¹ ‘Quo ruitis, viri Belial, haeredes Dohec?’ *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket*, I, p. 132.

⁸² *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket*, IV, pp. 129–133. Here, however, the names do not appear in conjunction as they do in William of Canterbury’s and Master Robert’s *Vitae*.

⁸³ See above p. XXX.

⁸⁴ *The Letters of John of Salisbury 2. The Later Letters* (1163–1180), ed. by W.J. Millor and C.N.L. Brooke. *Oxford Medieval Texts* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 724–38. See the helpful stemma in Barlow, *Thomas Becket*, p. 5. Orme concludes that Robert of Cricklade relied heavily on John’s letter in his description of the martyrdom, see Orme, *A Reconstruction*, p. 395.

pus of letters on the Becket conflict.⁸⁵ Now, in a remarkable letter addressed to Becket and ominously foreshadowing his martyrdom, John compares the archbishop to David and Henry II to Saul.⁸⁶ In another letter to Thomas he likens those who attacked the rights of the English church and were responsible for Becket's exile to the slayer of the priests of Nob, *i.e.* Dohet.⁸⁷ John of Salisbury applies the Dohet comparison more than once in relation to the ecclesiastics who failed to support Becket.⁸⁸ Indirectly, John thus identifies Becket with David and the iniquitous King Henry with Saul.

The Saul and David theme hovers curiously over the story of Hákon and Magnús as it is presented in M.s.l. and *Orkneyinga saga*. Most conspicuously, Hákon's envy of Magnús is echoed by Saul's attitude towards the popular and much loved David.⁸⁹ Moreover, Hákon's meeting with a Swedish soothsayer has a certain correspondance in Saul's visit to the witch of Endor.⁹⁰ Most obviously, both seek help from a divinator in order to have their political future foretold and both, in the process, break religious taboos.⁹¹ The reasons why they take this step are also comparable. Whereas Saul sees the witch of Endor as a consequence of God's refusal to tell him what the future brings, Hákon visits the soothsayer because St Óláfr does not deem him worthy of divinatory revelation. However, given the somewhat native flavour of this particular episode, it seems unlikely that it figured in Master Robert's *Vita*.⁹² All the same, whether intentionally or not, this strange chapter fits neatly into the Saul and David pattern I have highlighted.

As Avrom Saltman has pointed out, implicit in John of Salisbury's comparison of Becket to David is yet another set of identifications: that of Becket with David, Henry with Absalom and bishop Gilbert Foliot with

⁸⁵ For the historical context of the letters see Anne Duggan, 'John of Salisbury and Thomas Becket', in *The World of John of Salisbury*, Studies in Church History 3, ed. by M. Wilks (Oxford, 1984), pp. 427–38.

⁸⁶ *The Letters of John of Salisbury*, pp. 168 & 174. Petrus de Rheims (d. 1247) likened the archbishop to king David and Henry II, the persecutor of the Church, to Saul. Roberta B. Phyllis, *Thomas Becket in the Medieval Latin Preaching Tradition. An Inventory of Sermons about St Thomas Becket c. 1170–c. 1400*, Instrumenta Patristica xxv (The Hague, 1992), p. 222.

⁸⁷ *The Letters of John of Salisbury*, p. 152.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 132 & 203.

⁸⁹ 'He was very envious at the friendships [*vinsældir*] and lordliness of saint Magnus.' M.s.l. (Rolls Series), p. 257.

⁹⁰ M.s.l., pp. 341–4; I Samuel xxviii.

⁹¹ 'En ef maður fer til finna oc verðr hann sannr að þui þa er hann utlægr oc ubota maðr oc firgort fe sinu öllu...', *Norges Gamle Love indtil 1387*, ed. by R. Keyser & P.A. Munch, I (Christiania, 1846), pp. 389–90. See also the law of Borgarþing, *ibid.*, p. 351.

⁹² Peter Foote, *Observations on Orkneyinga saga*, p. 199.

Achitophel.⁹³ The last named figure is of course the same Gilbert whom Robert of Cricklade denounces for slandering the archbishop in his *Vita*.⁹⁴

Key figures in Absalom's revolt against David are Achitophel and Husai. In M.s.l. we read:

því gerðist svá, at jarlar sendu sín í meðal, með orðsendingu friðar ok sættar, ina hyggustu ráðgjafa sína, er réttilega bera merking þeira Chusi [*i.e.* Husai] ok Achitophel, er báru sáttmál milli þeira Davíðs konungs ok Absalons, sonar hans, þá er þeir váru missáttir.⁹⁵

For that, it came so about that the earls sent with messages between them for peace and atonement their most trusty counsellors, who rightly betoken Chusi and Achitophel, who brought about the atonement between king David and Absalom his son when they had fallen out.⁹⁶

These words are somewhat curious, for in the Book of Samuel Achitophel and Husai can hardly be said to be involved in peace negotiations of any sort. On the contrary, Achitophel is Saul's evil counsellor who plots the murder of David and to that end he incites and encourages Absalom; it is only due to Husai's cunning that his plan is thwarted. Surely Hákon must here be identified with Absalom, his henchmen with Achitophel, Magnús with David, and his well-meaning counsellors with Husai. Against this background it is interesting to read in M.s.l. that Hákon ... *jafnskjótt vaknaði sem grimmbirna at hvelpum ræntum*... [... at once awoke as a grim she-bear robbed of her cubs...] when he heard of Magnús's return to the earldom. The phrase is a clear reference to the passage in the Book of Samuel (II 17), where Husai tells Absalom that David will react as a '...bear robbed of her whelps in the field' [King James version] against any attempt on his life.

Saul and Absalom are not the only biblical 'tyrants' Master Robert deems appropriate to allude to in his portrayal of earl Hákon Pálsson. The third one is the blasphemous king Ahab who set up false prophets (I Kings 16-18). In M.s.l. we read: 'All sins come of covetousness, and all unlawful desires proceed from greediness. That was proved with Ahab the most wrongful king, who persecuted Elias [*i.e.* Elijah] the prophet. ... The very same showed the traitor earl Hacon...'.⁹⁷ It should not come as a surprise

⁹³ Avrom Saltman, 'John of Salisbury and the World of the Old Testament', in *The World of John of Salisbury*, pp. 343-8.

⁹⁴ On Foliot's role in the Becket controversy see David Knowles, *The Episcopal Colleagues of Archbishop Thomas Becket* (Cambridge, 1951), pp. 115-27.

⁹⁵ M.s.l., p. 359.

⁹⁶ M.s.l. (Rolls Series), p. 259.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 260. 'Allar syndir gerast af girnd, ok allar fýstir óleyfðar af ágirni fram ganga. Þat reyndist með Achab, inum ranglátasta konungi, er ofsótti Heliam spámann. ... Þetta it sama svikarinn Hákon jarl...' M.s.l., p. 361.

that in a letter of 1166 John of Salisbury uses the same biblical comparison when he likens Henry's persecution of Becket to Ahab's oppression of the prophet Elijah.⁹⁸

The impression that Master Robert was influenced by the biblical allusions used by John of Salisbury in his writings on the Becket controversy is difficult to escape. Hákon and Henry II are compared, directly or indirectly, to Saul, Absalom and Ahab, all rulers who persecuted or treated wrongfully the chosen vessels of God's grace: David and Elijah or, in other words, Becket and St Magnús. In addition we have Dohet, the evil advisor, sowing ill will and laying the groundwork for the final tragedy. That Master Robert deemed Jerome's preface to Samuel and the Books of Kings to be an appropriate starting point for his work is hardly surprising in view of the many allusions he draws from these two books of the Old Testament.

According to M.s.l. the four knights burst into the church when Magnús has just attended mass and like the killers of St Thomas they desecrate the sanctuary with their evil intent.⁹⁹ Unlike Thomas, who is killed in the church (and in some accounts before the altar), Magnús is taken outside by Hákon's men. At this point, when death is imminent, a similarity can be noted for both, we are told, responded to this as though they were invited to a convivial gathering, Magnús to a feast and Thomas to a wedding.¹⁰⁰ Again we must concede that cheerfulness of martyrs in the face of death is a stock formula in martyrology, especially of the early saints, and so in fact is the wedding or the feasting motif.¹⁰¹ Moreover, it is uncertain whether this motif came into *Thómas saga II* through Robert of Cricklade, since it also appears in Edward Grim's biography of Becket finished in 1172.¹⁰²

As Magnús received the first blow from the executioner he ... *féll þá allt til jarðar ok gaf sik guði í vald, færandi honum sjálfan sik í fórn.*¹⁰³ After the

⁹⁸ *The Letters of John of Salisbury*, p. 247.

⁹⁹ M.s.l., p. 366.

¹⁰⁰ 'Hann var svá glaðr ok kátr, er þeir handtóku hann, sem honum væri til veizlu boðit', M.s.l., p. 366. 'Hann huggar harmþrungna, ok gerist svá blíðr, sem þeir menn væru komnir er honum byði til brullaups', *Thómas saga*, I, p. 534.

¹⁰¹ '... and then, after duplicating in her own body all her children's sufferings, she hastened to rejoin them, rejoicing and glorying in her death as though she had been invited to a bridal banquet instead of being a victim of the beasts.' The martyr is St Blandina of Lyon and the passage is from one of the earliest *passiones* of the Church. *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, ed. by J. Musurillo (Oxford, 1972), p. 797. See also *ibid.*, p. 209 and O'Reilly, *The Double Martyrdom*, p. 192.

¹⁰² '...tanquam ad nuptias illum invitaturi venissent', *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket*, II, p. 433; 'Eductus ergo hilari mente et intrepido animo quasi ad epulas invitatus...', *Legenda*, p. 307.

¹⁰³ M.s.l., p. 368. 'Then he fell flat on the earth and gave himself over into God's power, bringing himself to Him as an offering', M.s.l. (Rolls Series), p. 267.

second blow to his head, *Thómas saga II* says: ... *fellr erkibyskup framm á gólfrit með réttum líkama, svá fagrliga sem til bænar offrandi sik lifandi förn...*¹⁰⁴ Similar phrases are again common in ancient and medieval martyrology but the verbal echoes here are nevertheless worthy of attention.

Thómas saga II tells us that three of the assassins made penance for their crime, but that one of them, William de Tracy did not atone for his deed and accordingly he immediately experienced the wrath of God ‘...inasmuch as he rotted alive, and both his arms were dissolved from his body in the shoulder joint’. A similar fate befell many of those who had supported the knights in their wrong-doing.¹⁰⁵ Interestingly this description of godly wrath turning against the archbishop’s enemies is peculiar to *Thómas saga II* and Margaret Orme considers Robert of Cricklade the most likely source.¹⁰⁶ Likewise in M.s.l. (and *Orkneyinga saga*) the horrible fate that befell those who betrayed the martyr is emphasised.¹⁰⁷ Whether this section figured in Master Robert’s work is impossible to say. It is, of course, historical fact that Henry II made amends for his sins by undergoing public humiliation, and that Hákon Pálsson atoned for his by undertaking a pilgrimage to Rome. The parallels are nevertheless intriguing.

IV

Within a year of Becket’s death Robert of Cricklade composed his forty-two homilies on Ezekiel.¹⁰⁸ Commenting on the prophet’s famous vision of the ‘New Temple’ the Oxford prior gives a short account, surely among the first to be written, of Becket’s life and passion. On this occasion Robert’s ambition is not to compose a traditional *Vita et passio* of the saint. Rather, he handles the material in the manner of the sermonist who expounds Christian doctrine and virtues by use of *exempla*. For instance, by his life of patience and steadfastness in face of worldly pressure, his celibacy and courage, Thomas Becket makes all of us ‘blush with shame’ for our own behaviour. The learned style deployed by Robert suggests that the work was composed

¹⁰⁴ ‘... and at that blow the archbishop fell forward his body being stretched on the floor so sweetly as though offering himself as a living sacrifice’, *Thómas saga*, I, p. 544.

¹⁰⁵ *Thómas saga*, II, pp. 38–40.

¹⁰⁶ Orme, *A Reconstruction*, p. 396.

¹⁰⁷ *Orkneyinga saga*, p. 112; M.s.l., p. 372.

¹⁰⁸ The homilies are discussed in Smalley, *The Becket Conflict*, pp. 197–200. The homilies are unedited but the biblical passages that Robert comments on (the first 38 homilies) are gathered by J.B. Schneyer, *Repertorium der Lateinischen Sermones des Mittelalters für die Zeit von 1150–1350*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters, Band xlii, Heft 5 (Münster, 1974), pp. 171–7.

with a learned congregation in mind, perhaps the resident scholars of Oxford.

In this context it is interesting to observe the conspicuous sermon-like tone of Master Robert's sections of M.s.l. The life and passion of St Magnús is frequently used as a reference point for moral and theological digressions. Magnús's celibacy, generosity, piety and ultimate self-sacrifice are the ideals which those reading or listening to the *Vita* should aspire to emulate:

Nú, mínir kærustu, rekum brott líkamligar fýstir, ok forðumst elsku óleyfðra hluta, sigrandi ok yfirstigandi árásir lastanna, en fylgjum fótsporum ok lífi þessa ins dýrðliga píslarvátts með öllu megni vár hugskots, svá framalliga sem várr breyskleikr má bera. Fylgjum vegum lífs hans, höldum dæmum verka hans.¹⁰⁹

Now, my dearest, let us cast away carnal lusts, and keep us from the love of unlawful things, conquering and rising above the attacks of impiety; but let us follow the footsteps and life of this glorious martyr with all the strength of our minds, so far as our feebleness may bring us. Let us follow the ways of his life; let us hold to the pattern of his works.¹¹⁰

As Robert of Cricklade compares Thomas to a strong pillar supporting the Church in times of disarray, Magnús is similarly presented by Master Robert as the expeller of Satan and heathendom from the Northern world and the one who 'brings the tabernacle of almighty God', the Christian religion and the Church, to the region.¹¹¹ Both seem to have been fond of the tabernacle metaphor for Master Robert compares Magnús's self-sacrifice to the offerings brought into the tabernacle which symbolises the Church while Robert of Cricklade likens the New Temple, which he emphasised was but another manifestation of the tabernacle, to the temporal Church.¹¹² We know that Robert of Cricklade was familiar with Bede's work *De tabernaculo* and he in fact made a contribution to the current theological debate on the subject.¹¹³ Finally we may note the sermon-like nature of Master Robert's *Vita* is borne out by phrases such as *mínir kærustu* and *inir kærur bræðr*, the latter an obvious translation of *fratris carissimi*, i.e. 'dearest brothers'. This expression is mainly, although not exclusively, associated with medieval ser-

¹⁰⁹ M.s.l., p. 371.

¹¹⁰ M.s.l. (Rolls Series), pp. 269–70.

¹¹¹ M.s.l., p. 370.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 370; Smalley, *The Becket Conflict*, pp. 197–200

¹¹³ Smalley, *Study of the Bible*, p. 109.

mons and homilies and, in fact, Robert of Cricklade adopts it frequently in his exegesis on Ezechiel.¹¹⁴

That Master Robert was influenced by the early hagiographic and epistolary corpus on St Thomas Becket is, I believe, beyond reasonable doubt. Consequently, a further shadow of doubt must be cast over the dating of this earliest known *Life* of the Orcadian saint to c. 1137. In a somewhat tantalizing fashion the fragmentary *Life* of St Magnús by Master Robert leads us to a small and textually incestuous circle of early authorities on Becket: William of Canterbury, Robert of Cricklade, *Anonymous* II and John of Salisbury.¹¹⁵ It goes without saying that this conclusion does not prove that Master Robert of M.s.I. and *magister* Robert of Cricklade's were one and same person; it only makes this hypothesis more plausible.

V

Around the middle of the thirteenth century an unknown Icelandic author composed a biography of Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson, an Icelandic chieftain from the West Fjords, who was killed in 1213. This work, the separate *Hrafn's saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, contains all the essential elements associated with the hagiography on royal and princely saints: Hrafn is portrayed as a just ruler who treats his underlings with generosity and fairness. His rival, Þorvaldr, is cast in the mould of the devil's henchman whose envy of the popular Hrafn is fuelled by slanderers. Finally Þorvaldr ambushes Hrafn at his homestead where the latter is executed in a martyr-like fashion.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ At the beginning of the following homilies: nr. 3: 'oportet, fratres carissimi, textum litterae subtilius intellegere...'; nr. 17: 'Consideremus, fratres carissimi...'; nr. 27: 'Continuam, fratres, expositionem exhibuimus...'. Schneyer, *Repertorium*, pp. 171–7.

¹¹⁵ Robert of Cricklade's journey to Scotland, where he appears as a witness to a number of charters issued by Malcolm IV, has been noted by both Finnbogi Guðmundsson and Peter Foote. The dating of the documents where Robert's name appears has hitherto been given between 1159 and 1165. Now, however, it is possible to pin down the date of Robert's journey to Scotland more accurately. Since the publication of the Acts of William IV, G.W.S. Barrow has corrected a number of his manuscript readings, including a charter issued at Perth where Robert of Cricklade now appears as a witness. See the uncorrected document in *The Acts of Malcolm IV King of Scots, 1153–1165*, collected and edited by G.W.S. Barrow, *Regesta regum Scottorum 1153–1424*, v. 1 (Edinburgh 1960), p. 274 (nr. 260). The Perth charter was definitely issued in 1164 and therefore it seems certain that Robert stayed in Scotland during the winter of 1164–5, presumably at the court of king Malcolm. *The Acts of William I King of Scots 1165–1214*, ed. by G.W.S. Barrow, with the collaboration of W.W. Scott, *Regesta regum Scottorum*, v. 2 (Edinburgh, 1971), p. 118. For the possible relevance of this journey to Robert's authorship of the Magnús *Vita*, see Foote, *Master Robert's Prologue*, 74.

¹¹⁶ See Ásdis Egilsdóttir's paper in this volume.

It has been shown that author of the *Hrafn saga* was influenced by Master Robert's *Life* of St Magnús and, interestingly, a biography of St Thomas of Canterbury, probably the one by Robert of Cricklade.¹¹⁷ The connection between the two works examined in the paper and *Hrafn saga* is hardly a coincidence. Perhaps the author had access to a manuscript which contained both Robert of Cricklade's work on St Thomas of Canterbury and St Magnús of Orkney. At the very least, he saw fit to allude to these two twelfth-century martyrs in connection with the life and death of an Icelandic chieftain.

In his influential, and now classic, study on the idea of sanctity in the later Middle Ages André Vauchez showed how a distinctive form of sainthood prevailed in Northern and North-western Europe in this period. The overwhelming number of saints in Scandinavia, England and to some extent France were of noble stock: kings, princes, earls, bishops or abbots. In particular the royal martyr, 'the holy sufferer' dominated the ranks of sainthood in England until the eleventh century and in Scandinavia up to the thirteenth century. In England there was a notable shift from the veneration of royal saints to that of to bishop saints. The cataclysmic event was the murder of Thomas Becket, for in his death the popular and emotionally charged idea of the 'innocent martyr' became fused with the ideals of Church reform and Church independence. Here was an extremely potent blend and the biographers of the saintly bishops of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries made frequent use of the Becket model of sanctity even though the ultimate sacrifice of martyrdom came rarely into play.¹¹⁸

Thus the model of the 'holy sufferer', intimately associated with the martyrdom of secular rulers, was applied to the murder of Thomas Becket. Perhaps it is here, irrespective of the question of authorship, that we have found the fundamental link between the two incompletely preserved Latin Lives of St Magnús of Orkney and St Thomas of Canterbury.¹¹⁹ The author of *Hrafn Saga* appears to have grasped this link when he wrote a biography of his hero.

¹¹⁷ See footnote 48. Peter Foote has not ruled out the possibility that Magnús's martyrdom was known to the author of *Hrafn saga* from *Orkneyinga saga*. Peter Foote, 'Beyond All Reasonable Doubt', *Eyvindarbók. Festskrift til Eyvind Fjeld Halvorsen 4. mai 1992*, ed. by F. Hødnebo (Oslo, 1992), pp. 63–8.

¹¹⁸ André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, transl. by J. Birrell (Cambridge, 1997, first published 1988), pp. 167–73.

¹¹⁹ In this connection it is interesting to see St Thomas appearing on a fifteenth century Norwegian altarpiece in tandem with St Ólaf, St Edmund of East Anglia and St Magnús of Orkney. Tancred Borenius, *St Thomas Becket in Art* (London, 1932), pp. 20–1.

LAND ASSESSMENT AND THE SILVER ECONOMY OF NORSE SCOTLAND

Gareth Williams

Norse settlement in Scotland and the Isle of Man can be traced in a variety of ways. Documentary evidence includes contemporary material from Britain and Ireland, as well as the sagas and other later medieval sources. This is supplemented by archaeological and place-name evidence. This supplementary material sometimes corroborates the documentary evidence, but it often provides information on matters for which no documentary evidence survives. It is only the combination of different types of evidence that presents a reasonably complete picture of Norse settlement in the area.¹ This area included the Northern and Western Isles of Scotland, much of the western seaboard, Caithness, Sutherland and parts of Ross, and the Isle of Man.² The area contained two main political powers; the earldom of Orkney from around the end of the ninth century, and the kingdom of Man and the Isles from the mid to late tenth century onwards. One important feature of Norse settlement is the presence throughout much of the area of a system of land assessment based on two units, the ounceland and the pennyland. This system is without direct parallels either in Scandinavia or the British Isles, and shows regional variation even within Norse Scotland. It is also not clear (see below) that ounculands and pennylands were both part of the same original system.³ The ounceland existed in Shetland, Orkney, Caithness (and possibly Sutherland), Man and the Isles, and some areas of the western seaboard. The pennyland was used in all the same areas, with the exception of Islay and the Isle of Man, and also extended into Galloway and south western Scotland (See fig. *Pennylands and Ounculands* below). In the north there were 18 pennylands to the ounceland, and in the west 20 pennylands to the ounceland, and the language in which the units were named similarly varies according to location. In the north the ounceland was known as the *eyrisland* (ON 'land of an ounce'), in the west by the Gaelic equivalent *ti-*

¹ A fundamental introduction to the subject, and one which emphasises the importance of an inter-disciplinary approach, is provided by B.E. Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland* (Leicester, 1987).

² Scandinavian settlement along the east coast of Scotland south of Ross is not considered here, as this seems not to have been part of the same political grouping as the settlement further north and west (See Simon Taylor's paper, this volume).

³ It has recently been suggested that ounculands throughout Norse Scotland do not represent a single assessment at all. W.P.L. Thomson, 'Ounculands and Pennylands in the West Highlands and Islands', *Northern Scotland* 22 (2002), pp. 27–43.

runga, and in Man as the *treen*, apparently a Manx version of Gaelic *ti-runga*.⁴ Although place-name evidence suggests Norse settlement on the east coast of Scotland, especially in Ross, there is no evidence for the existence of ounceland or pennyland divisions in this area.⁵

Ouncelands and pennylands are known both from place-names and from references in charters and rentals. Although this evidence is mostly from the later Middle Ages, and generally post-dates Norse control of the areas concerned, the concordance between the ounceland / pennyland distribution and other evidence of Norse settlement clearly suggests that the assessment system was introduced under Norse rule, while the fact that the system extends as far as Man suggests that the system must predate 1266, the year in which Man and the Isles were ceded to Scotland by Norway in the Treaty of Perth. This finds support from the sole saga reference to the ounceland, in the near contemporary *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, which states that following his failure to reassert Norwegian rule over the Western Isles in 1263, Hákon of Norway sailed to Orkney and *lét þá skrá lendum mönnum ok sveitarhöfðingjum eyris-lönd til vista-töku, at halda ær sveitir sem við þeim voru, ok svá af hverjum eyris-löndum*.⁶

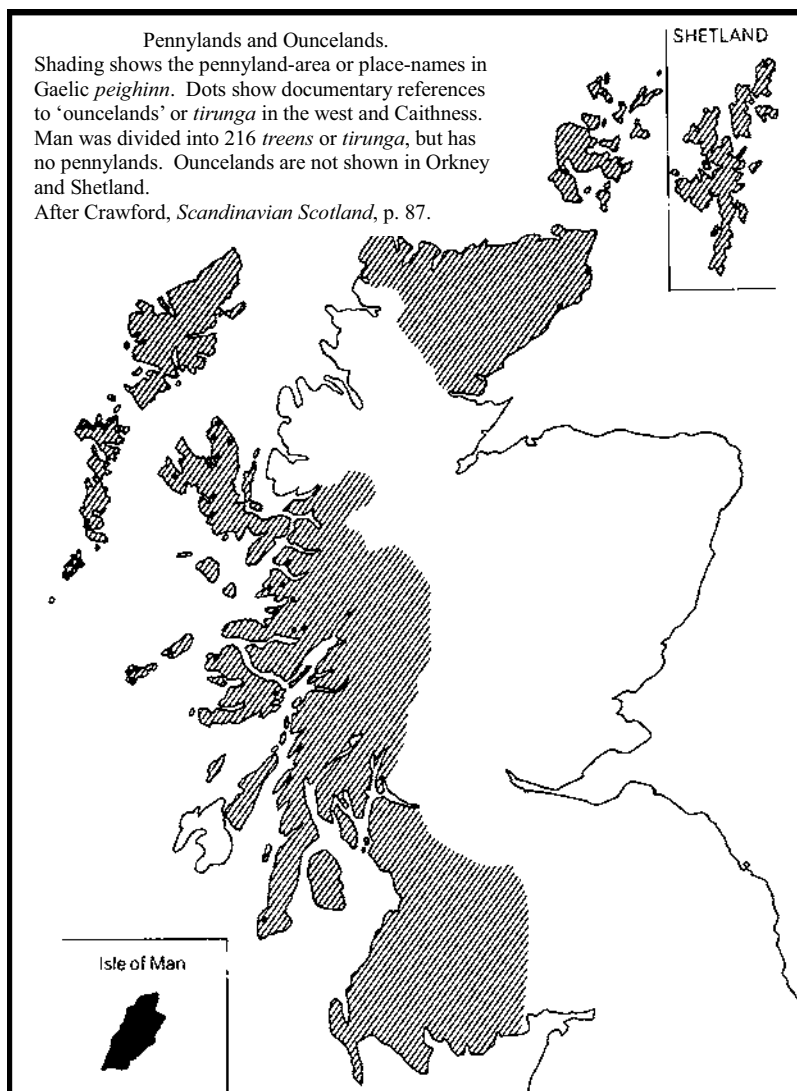
Two main schools of thought exist on the origins of the ounceland and pennyland; one attributing them to the Norse, the other to the pre-Norse inhabitants of the lands conquered by the Norse. Study of ouncelands and pennylands was initiated in the 1880s by F.W.L. Thomas, who argued that a single ounceland / pennyland assessment-system of undoubtedly Norse origins was imposed onto an existing system of land divisions, the Pictish *dabhach*.⁷ This view was elaborated by H. Marwick, who suggested that the

⁴ H. Marwick, 'Leidang in the West', *POAS* 13 (1934–5), pp. 15–29.

⁵ Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, pp. 86–7. Crawford has argued that the lack of evidence for ouncelands and pennylands in Ross may be misleading, and that the place-name Scatwell (ON *skatt-völlr* 'tax field') indicates 'that the earl's taxation system was indeed imposed in this locality; and if imposed in this corner of Ross, then undoubtedly over all the province.' (B.E. Crawford, 'The Making of a Frontier: The Firthlands from the Ninth to Twelfth Centuries', in *The Firthlands*, ed. by J.R. Baldwin (Edinburgh, 1986), pp. 33–46 at p. 43). However, Crawford has since questioned this derivation of the name Scatwell (B.E. Crawford, *Earl & Mormaer: Norse-Pictish relationships in Northern Scotland* (Rosemarkie, 1995), pp. 22–3), which removes the sole piece of evidence for Norse administrative systems in this area. See also Crawford's paper in this volume for further discussion of Norse control of Ross.

⁶ *HS*, Ch. 328, p. 353. '[King Hákon] then had a list made of ouncelands for the provisioning of his *lendr menn* and war chieftains, to support the war bands which were with them, and thus from each ounceland.'

⁷ F.W.L. Thomas, 'What is a Pennyland? Ancient Valuation of Land in the Scottish Isles', *PSAS* 18 (1884), pp. 258 ff.; *idem*, 'Ancient Valuation of Land in the West of Scotland: Continuation of What is a Pennyland?', *PSAS* 20 (1885–6), pp. 200–13.



Land Assessment Fig. 1: Pennylands and Ouncelands.

origins of the ounceland assessment lay in the introduction to the Norse settlements in Scotland of a ship-levy system, based on the Norwegian *leiðangr*, by the Norwegian king Haraldr *inn hárfagri*, c. 900.⁸ The Norwegian philologist C.J.S. Marstrander reached similar conclusions from a different approach.⁹

This view remained the norm until the 1970s, when J.W.M. Bannerman pointed to similarities between the ounceland / pennyland system in western Scotland and the assessment systems of the earlier Scottish kingdom of Dál Riata, suggesting the possibility that both land units and assessments might have been adopted by the Norse when they conquered Dál Riata.¹⁰ B.R.S. Megaw suggested a few years later that the ounceland system in the Isles might already have been in place before the Norse arrived.¹¹ This idea was further developed by A.R. Easson, who attempted to view the ouncelands and pennylands of western Scotland in a broader Scottish context, while ignoring those in the Northern Isles as an unrelated system.¹²

Neither approach really bears close scrutiny. The foundations of Marwick's theory have been overtaken by more recent research. In attributing the ounceland / pennyland system to Haraldr *inn hárfagri*, Marwick accepted at face value the saga accounts of Haraldr's voyages to the British Isles, and of the extent of his royal authority. While P.H. Sawyer may perhaps go too far in rejecting them entirely (they receive corroboration of sorts from the *Hanes Gruffydd ap Cynan*, the twelfth-century biography of a Welsh prince¹³),¹⁴ the tradition of Haraldr exercising authority over any part of the British Isles is now regarded as, at best, unreliable. Furthermore, the attribution to Haraldr is difficult to reconcile with Marwick's suggestion that the ounceland / pennyland system was based on the Norwegian *leiðangr* system. There is no evidence to suggest that any formalised na-

⁸ H. Marwick, *Leidang in the West*; *idem*, 'Naval Defence in Norse Scotland', *SHR* 28 (1949), pp. 1–11; *idem*, *Orkney Farm Names* (Kirkwall, 1952), p. 212.

⁹ C.J.S. Marstrander, 'Det Norske Landnåm på Man', *NTSV* 6 (1932), pp. 40–386; *idem*, 'Treen og Keeill', *NTSV* 8 (1937), pp. 287–442.

¹⁰ J.W.M. Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dalriada* (Edinburgh, 1974).

¹¹ B.R.S. Megaw, 'Pennyland and Davoch in South-Western Scotland', *Scottish Studies* 23 (1979), pp. 75–7.

¹² A.R. Easson, *Systems of Land Assessment in Scotland before 1300*, unpublished PhD thesis (Edinburgh, 1986); *idem*, 'Ouncelands and Pennylands in the West Highlands of Scotland', in *Ouncelands and Pennylands*, ed. by L.J. MacGregor & B.E. Crawford (St Andrews, 1987), pp. 1–12.

¹³ *A Mediaeval Prince of Wales; The Life of Gruffydd ap Cynan*, ed. & trans. by D.S. Evans (Felinfach 1990), pp. 24–5; A.G. Van Hamel, 'Norse History in Hanes Gruffydd ap Cynan', *Revue Celtique* 42 (1925), pp. 336–41.

¹⁴ P.H. Sawyer, 'Harald Fairhair and the British Isles', in *Les Vikings et leur civilisation. Problèmes Actuels*, ed. by R. Boyer (Paris, 1976) pp. 105–9; Easson, *Ouncelands and pennylands*, p. 6; Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, pp. 51–3.

tional *leiðangr* system predates the reign of Haraldr's son Hákon in the mid-tenth century, and recent thinking would suggest that the sort of formalised system on which Marwick's theory relies is more likely to date from the late twelfth-thirteenth centuries than the tenth.¹⁵ This makes it extremely unlikely that *leiðangr* could have influenced the ounceland / pennyland system, since a system introduced so late would have left little trace in western Scotland, as Norwegian control in this area was exercised only occasionally in this period, and Norwegian claims to the area were surrendered in 1266 by the Treaty of Perth.

Furthermore, the suggestion that the military aspect of *leiðangr* can be observed in Orkney rests entirely on interpretation of the sagas which is both uncritical and subjective. While various passages in *Orkneyinga saga* can be read as references to a version of the *leiðangr* system,¹⁶ the details given are not reliable, and can equally well be interpreted to refer to the personal war-bands of individual chieftains.¹⁷ Marwick's argument also relied heavily on comparison of rates of taxation in Orkney and (following the work of A. Steinnes) Norway, and of land values across the whole of Norse Scotland.¹⁸ These comparisons were implicitly based on assumptions of economic stability in the fourteenth–sixteenth centuries. However, the discovery of a fragment of a fifteenth century Manx rental unknown to Marwick has shown that rents and values could fluctuate in a very short period.¹⁹ More recent work on both Scandinavia and Orkney indicates price variations and large scale economic disruption in both areas in the later Middle Ages.²⁰ Although Norway was very badly affected by the Black Death, the absence of such information for Norse Scotland makes comparisons difficult.²¹ Norway was apparently much harder hit by the subsequent depression than other Scandinavian countries,²² probably with a sudden

¹⁵ N. Lund, *Lið, leding og landeværn* (Roskilde, 1996) pp. 58–74; D.G.E. Williams, *Land Assessment and Military Organisation in the Norse Settlements in Scotland, c. 900–1266 AD*, unpublished PhD thesis (St Andrews, 1996), pp. 156–95.

¹⁶ Marwick, *Leidang in the West*; *idem*, *Naval Defence in Norse Scotland*; J. S. Clouston, 'The Battle of Tankerness', in *POAS* 6 (1927–8), pp. 21–5.

¹⁷ Williams, *Land Assessment*, pp. 251–67.

¹⁸ Marwick, *Leidang in the West*, *passim*; A. Steinnes, *Gamal skatteskippnad i Noreg* (Vid.-Akad. i Oslo, Avh. 1930 II no. 1 (Vol 1) 1933 II no. 3 (Vol 2)).

¹⁹ M. Crellin, 'An Early Manorial Roll', *JMM* 7 (1969), pp. 98–9; B.R.S. Megaw, 'Norseman and Native in the Kingdom of the Isles', *Scot. Stud.* 20 (1976), pp. 1–44.

²⁰ S. Gissel *et al.*, *Desertion and Land Colonisation in the Nordic Countries, c. 1300–1600* (Stockholm, 1981); W.P.L. Thomson, 'Fifteenth Century Depression in Orkney; the Evidence of Lord Henry Sinclair's Rentals', in *Essays in Shetland History*, ed. by B. E. Crawford (Lerwick, 1984), pp. 125–42.

²¹ Thomson, *Depression*, pp. 130–3.

²² Gissel *et al.*, *Desertion*, pp. 91–102.

drop in prices after 1350, with a trend to generally low prices until some time in the fifteenth century.²³ While a similar trend can be observed in the Orkney rentals, Thomson points out that ‘rentals provide only a restricted range of information and there is a frustrating lack of facts about land prices, farm size, population and trade’.²⁴ Thus Marwick’s figures were developed with no clear picture of the full economic situation, and it seems unlikely that they fit as neatly as Marwick suggested.²⁵

The argument that the ounceland-pennyland system was pre-Norse is also unconvincing. The very fact that assessment in ouncelands and pennylands coincides so closely with known areas of Norse settlement, but spreads across several pre-Norse political groupings suggests very strongly that the assessment system itself is Norse. That is not to say that there is no pre-Norse influence on the system. In western Scotland, the ounceland was divided not into 18 pennylands, as in the north, but into 20 pennylands. Division by eighteen was consistent not only with the Norse duodecimal counting system, but more specifically with known sub-divisions of the ounce. Written records survive of a unit called the *ertog*, which was one-third of an ounce, and weights apparently representing the *ertog* and the half-*ertog* are well known from the archaeological record.²⁶ By contrast, a division into twenty has no place in the same system. It is conceivable that assessment in the west was based on a quite different relationship between ounce and penny (a ratio of 20 pennies to the ounce being known, for example, intermittently from the ninth–eleventh centuries in England).²⁷ However, the difference may be explained by the superimposition of the ounceland-pennyland assessment in the west on to pre-Norse land units grouped in twenties. Such a unit can be found in the *Senchus fer nAlban*, or ‘History of the Men of Alba’. This survives in several slightly variant late manuscripts, which according to Bannerman derive from a single mid-tenth century version. This in turn he takes to be derived from a seventh-century original.²⁸ The *Senchus* consists of a survey of the principal families of Dál

²³ Gissel *et al*, *Desertion*, p. 99.

²⁴ Thomson, *Depression*, pp. 126–31, 134–6.

²⁵ W.P.L. Thomson, ‘Ouncelands and Pennylands in Orkney and Shetland’, in *Ouncelands and Pennylands*, ed. by L.J. MacGregor & B.E. Crawford (St Andrews, 1987) pp. 24–45 (p. 30).

²⁶ A.W. Brøgger, *Ertog og Øre: Den Gamle Norske Vekt* (Kristiania, 1921), *passim*; S.E. Kruse, ‘Ingots and weight units in Viking Age silver hoards’, *World Archaeology* 20:2 (1988), pp. 285–301 (pp. 286–7).

²⁷ A. McKerral, ‘The Lesser Land and Administrative Divisions in Celtic Scotland’, *PSAS* 85 (1950–1), pp. 52–64 (pp. 56–7).

²⁸ Bannerman, *Dalriada*, pp. 39, 131. Skene dates this text more broadly to before 1372 (W.F. Skene, *Chronicles of the Picts and Scots*, 1867, pp. lxxviii, 308). One should also note that the *Genealach Albanensium*, which follows the *Senchus* in all the surviving manuscripts

Riata, together with what appears to be a survey of their civil, military and naval organisation. While there are problems with accepting the reliability of the *Senchus*,²⁹ it would be rash to ignore it as a source altogether. The standard assessment unit of the *Senchus* is the *tech*, or 'house', and the most common sept holding in the *Senchus* is the 20-'house' unit, comparable to the uncenland of 20 pennylands. The only smaller units found are 5, 10, and 15, corresponding to multiples of quarter uncenlands, which also seem to be of some importance in the Norse system. These units also correspond closely to the numbers of *dóer-chéli*, or base clients, assigned to the various grades of nobility in *Crith Gablach*, an early Irish text; the *aire déso* had 5, the *aire ardd* 10, the *aire túise* 15, and the *aire forgill* 20. This parallel does suggest that the 'house' groupings at least may be genuinely pre-Norse.³⁰

This does not, however, suggest that either uncenlands or pennylands are pre-Norse assessment units, as both Megaw and Easson have suggested.³¹ Megaw's argument was based on the equivalence in the later Middle Ages between the uncenland and the *dabhach*, an assessment unit which, like Bannerman and Easson he took to represent the 20-'house' unit of Dál Riata. However, the distribution of the *dabhach*, both in place-names and charter references is largely confined to central and eastern Scotland before 1400, a distribution described by Geoffrey Barrow as 'inescapably Pictish',³² and recent research suggests that the *dabhach* was a product either of the Pictish kingdom or the tenth-century kingdom which succeeded it, and only extended to northern and western Scotland following the Treaty of Perth in 1266. Ironically, even then the former Dál Riata remained one of

(Bannerman, *Dalriada*, p. 27) includes the genealogy of Malcolm II (1005–34), extended even further in two MSS to David I. While there is no evidence that the two texts belong together from any earlier than the 14th century, there is equally no firm evidence that they do not, which could indicate a compilation of the 11th century rather than the tenth century as Bannerman suggests. Bannerman (*Dalriada*, p. 110) suggests that the *GA* contains elements from the early 8th century (continuing the genealogical section of the *Senchus*) while the more recent kings were added at a later date.

²⁹ Williams, *Land Assessment*, pp. 58–62.

³⁰ Bannerman, *Dalriada*, pp. 134–40, especially pp. 135–7; Easson, *Land Assessment*, pp. 32–4.

³¹ Megaw, *Pennyland and Davoch*, pp. 75–77; Easson (*Land Assessment*, pp. 129–30) argues for an original uncenland assessment in 20-'house' units, adapted to 18-pennyland groups in the Northern Isles and Caithness. She does not explain satisfactorily why, having borrowed the system completely from the Celts, the Norse should feel compelled to change it in these areas but not on the west coast.

³² G.W.S. Barrow, 'Rural Settlement in Central and Eastern Scotland: The Medieval Evidence', *Scot. Stud.* 6 (1962), pp. 123–44 (p. 135).

the few areas of Scotland for which there is no evidence of the *dabhach* at all.³³

Furthermore, while the Gaelic names for the ounceland and pennyland could derive from Latin and Old English respectively, rather than representing translations or loans from Old Norse,³⁴ the idea of a pennyland assessment in pre-Norse Dál Riata is unlikely, given the lack of finds of anything which could be called ‘pennies’ of the appropriate period from the area, whereas ‘pennies’ from a variety of sources feature both in hoards and as single finds from the Viking age.³⁵

It thus seems reasonable to accept the suggestion that assessment in ouncelands and pennylands may have been superimposed onto the Dalriadic ‘house’ system in the west, and similar arguments may also be made for the Isle of Man.³⁶ It is quite possible that something similar is true for the earldom of Orkney, but the total lack of evidence for pre-Norse assessment systems makes such a suggestion purely hypothetical. Apart from the adaptation of pre-existing assessment units, however, little can be accepted either of the traditional ‘Norse’ or ‘pre-Norse’ theories of the ounceland and pennyland assessments.

Any replacement theories must fit a broader range of criteria. Firstly, given the terms ‘ounce’ and ‘penny’, any model must be consistent with what is known of the silver economy of Norse Scotland. It must also be consistent with structures of landholding, and with developments in political authority and administration. The remainder of this paper will consider these constraints, and propose a possible model for the introduction of the ounceland and pennyland assessments.

Evidence on the circulation of silver, and on the use of weights, comes largely from archaeological sources. Hoards of recognisably Scandinavian character are known from the Northern and Western Isles and the Isle of Man, as well as from the Scottish mainland, and together with a number of single finds and grave goods, these provide a considerable body of evidence. The hoards are helpful in a number of ways. The presence of datable coins provides a chronological framework for patterns of hoarding, and thus

³³ For a re-statement of the Pictish interpretation, see J. Bäcklund, ‘War or Peace? The Relations between the Picts and the Norse in Orkney’, *Northern Studies* 36 (2001), pp. 33–48. For the arguments for re-dating the *dabhach*, see G. Williams, ‘The *dabhach* reconsidered: pre-Norse or post-Norse?’, *Northern Studies* 37 (forthcoming).

³⁴ Easson, *Ouncelands and Pennylands*, pp. 2–7.

³⁵ J.A. Graham-Campbell, *The Viking-Age Gold and Silver of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1995), *passim*.

³⁶ Megaw, *Norseman and Native*, pp. 19–21; P. Reilly, *Computer Analysis of an Archaeological Landscape: Medieval Land Divisions in the Isle of Man*, BAR 190 (1988), *passim*; Williams, *Land Assessment*, pp. 76–90.

some indication of dates which might be significant in relation to the use of silver in Norse Scotland. Comparative study of the contents of different hoards allows the identification of distinct regional patterns within Norse Scotland. It is also useful to consider the possible functions of hoarding as a reflection of economy and society. The following discussion is largely based on hoard-evidence, but single finds of coins (especially site-finds) also suggest the use of pennies within the economy of Norse Scotland throughout the Viking Age.³⁷

J. Graham-Campbell's comprehensive study of silver and gold in Norse Scotland identifies 34 hoards, and 24 single finds.³⁸ To this must also be added some 20 hoards from the Isle of Man.³⁹ The majority of these finds come from areas of Norse settlement, although there are a few exceptions, with hoards identified in Perthshire, Fife, and the Borders. Excluding these (although it is tempting to link the Fife (and possibly Perthshire) hoards with the saga account of the conquests of Earl Þorfinnr hinn ríki (see below), it is possible to establish a chronological pattern of hoarding, overall and on a regional basis (see Figure 2 below).

The first peak, in the 970s–980s, is discernible in Western Scotland and the Isle of Man, but has left no definite trace in the Northern Isles or Caithness. This is a period of known political instability in the West: the sons of Haraldr, who seem to have ruled Man during this period, were in conflict with the growing power of Earl Sigurðr Hlöðvisson of Orkney (see below), and possibly also with Óláfr Cuarán of Dublin, who died on Iona in 980.⁴⁰ Sigurðr is explicitly stated in the sagas to have plundered in the Hebrides and Man, and to have carried off silver, and this provides a likely context for the burial of silver. A hoard from Iona from the mid 980s has also been tentatively linked with a known raid on the island in 986.⁴¹ However, since the documentary record is so incomplete at this period, attempts to associate the deposition of hoards with specific historical events may easily lead to incorrect conclusions.⁴² Nevertheless, the broad dating pattern of the hoards matches well with the period associated with Sigurðr's raiding.

³⁷ G. Williams and N. Sharples, 'Et nytt myntfunn fra Olav Kyrre fra Hebridene', *Nordisk Numismatisk Unions Medlemsblad* (2003).

³⁸ Graham-Campbell, *Viking-Age Gold and Silver*, *passim*.

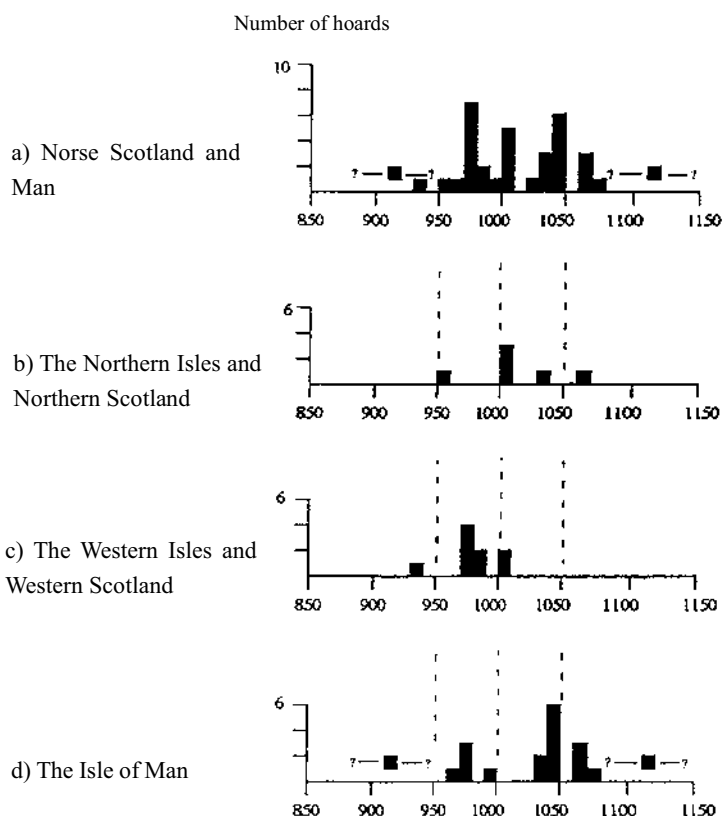
³⁹ J.A. Graham-Campbell, 'The Viking-Age silver hoards of the Isle of Man', in *The Viking Age in the Isle of Man*, ed. by C. Fell *et al.* (London, 1983), pp. 53–80. A hoard discovered during excavations at Peel Castle in 1983 has been dated to c. 1040. I am grateful to Mr A.C.C. Johnson of the Manx Museum for this information.

⁴⁰ Williams, *Land Assessment*, pp. 127, 140–3.

⁴¹ Metcalf, *Monetary Significance*, p. 22.

⁴² K. Jonsson, *The New Era: The Reformation of the Late Anglo-Saxon Coinage* (Stockholm & London, 1987), p. 68.

Land Assesment Fig. 2: Deposition of silver coin and mixed hoards in Norse Scotland and Man



After J.A. Graham-Campbell, *Viking-Age Gold and Silver, Isle of Man and Northern Hoards*, and information from Mr A.C.C. Johnson of the Manx Museum.

Only hoards which can be closely dated by their coin contents are included in the graphs, although a number of coinless hoards can also be roughly dated by comparison between their contents and those of coin-dated hoards. Not all coinless hoards, however, can be satisfactorily dated on a comparative basis, while some known coin-hoards cannot be dated because insufficient details were recorded at their discovery, and the contents of the hoards not preserved.

The second peak, *c.* 1000, has a more widespread distribution, with two hoards from Argyll, and one each from Orkney, Shetland, and Ross.⁴³ No hoard is known from exactly this date from the Isle of Man, although a hoard from Bradda Head on Man from the 990s might possibly be grouped with them. No specific historical context exists for this group of hoards, although it coincides with the peak of the power of Earl Sigurðr, and may certainly be taken as an indication of the wealth in circulation under his rule.⁴⁴ While nothing is recorded of the circumstances surrounding the death of Rögnvaldr Guðrøðsson, King of the Isles in 1005,⁴⁵ it seems unlikely that his position remained unchallenged by Sigurðr, and the two Argyll hoards may again reflect conflict in the West.

The third peak, during the 1030s–1040s, is largely restricted to the Isle of Man, with the exception of the Caldale hoard from Orkney, and the two hoards from Fife. It is far from certain who controlled Man during this period: certainly kings linked with the Dublin dynasty attempted to exercise control, and the contents of the hoards show distinctly Irish characteristics, but Earl Þorfinnr of Orkney may also have had some authority in the area (see below). Whether or not Þorfinnr was challenging the Dublin kings at this time, there would seem to have been enough internal conflict between rival Irish claimants to justify linking the hoards of this period with the lack of security and stability generated by that conflict.⁴⁶

It is also remarkable that hoarding continued in Man after this, with three hoards in the 1060s, one in the 1070s, and one (of uncertain date) even later, whereas nothing is known from western Scotland with certainty after *c.* 1000,⁴⁷ while Orkney has only the Caldale hoard of *c.* 1035, and Shetland the Dunrossness hoard of *c.* 1065(?). The fact that the Manx hoards again show Irish links supports the written evidence that Man was more closely linked with Ireland than with the Norse in Scotland during this period.⁴⁸ Thus, while hoarding throughout the whole of the Norse settlements had certainly begun by the mid-tenth century, it seems to have been largely abandoned except in Man by the mid-eleventh century. While it is dangerous to attempt to draw conclusions from such a small body of evidence (es-

⁴³ Graham-Campbell, *Northern Hoards*, pp. 174–6; Metcalf, *Monetary Significance*, p. 19.

⁴⁴ Graham-Campbell, *Isle of Man*, p. 57; Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, pp. 65–8.

⁴⁵ *AU*, sub 1005.

⁴⁶ S. Duffy, 'Irishmen and Islesmen in the Kingdoms of Dublin and Man, 1052–1171', *Ériu* 13, 1992, pp. 93–133; Williams, *Land Assessment*, pp. 129–32, 145–6.

⁴⁷ A recently discovered hoard from Stornoway, Lewis (not included on the graphs) can only be very broadly dated from *c.* 990–*c.* 1040, as the only coins in the hoard are too fragmentary to permit detailed dating (Metcalf, *Monetary Significance*, p. 23).

⁴⁸ Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, p. 133.

pecially given the problems of using hoard deposition as evidence in the first place), it seems possible from studying the dating of the hoards that some social or economic change took place in the Northern and Western Isles in the early to mid-eleventh century that made hoarding no longer seem appropriate, whereas no such change took place in Man; perhaps because it was politically separated from the other islands during this period. In order to consider the likely nature and implications of such a change, it is necessary first to examine the contents of the hoards, and then the likely purpose, or purposes, of hoarding.

The hoards contain a wide variety of silver items: personal ornaments, in the form of brooches, arm-rings, finger-rings, and necklaces; coins; and currency in the form of silver bullion. This last could take the form of moulded ingots, or of hack-silver (fragments of larger items), apparently valued in either case in terms of their weight and quality. Neither of these is likely to have been assessed with great accuracy; silver was tested simply by bending or pecking to check that the metal was of acceptable quality, with no facility for complicated assaying, while a margin of error seems to have been accepted around the standard weights (see below).

Particularly significant for the study of pennylands is the presence of coins. The only coin minted in northern Europe during much of this period was the silver penny (although subject to a great number of national and regional variations), and its presence in so many hoards of coins even from the early to mid-tenth century suggests widespread familiarity with the concept of the penny during this period, even though no coins were minted in Norse Scotland itself, with the possible brief exception of the Isle of Man for a short period from the 1020s, nor even in the Kingdom of the Scots before the reign of David I, possibly from *c.* 1136.⁴⁹ Like ingots and hack-silver, coins were probably valued in Scotland and Scandinavia during the Viking Age by their weight alone, rather than for any monetary significance.⁵⁰ Thus, provided that there was reasonable stability in the weight of pennies available, it was perfectly possible for there to be a recognised ratio of pennies to the ounce, and therefore pennylands to the ounce-land, even in the absence of a proper monetary economy.

⁴⁹ R.H.M. Dolley, 'A Hiberno-Manx coinage of the eleventh century', *Numismatic Chronicle* 136, 1976, pp. 75–84; K.A. Bornholdt, 'Myth or Mint? The evidence for a Viking-age coinage in the Isle of Man', in *Recent Archaeological Research on the Isle of Man*, ed. P. Davey, *BAR British Series* 278 (Oxford, 1999), pp. 199–220; V. Smart, 'The Penny in the Pennylands: Coinage in Scotland in the Early Middle Ages', *Northern Studies* 22, 1985, pp. 65–70.

⁵⁰ M. Gaimster, 'Money and Media in Viking Age Scandinavia', in *Social Approaches to Viking Studies*, ed. by R. Samson (Glasgow, 1991), pp. 113–22, at p. 117; Metcalf, *Monetary Significance*, p. 16.

The coins known from the hoards come from a variety of sources, of which the most prominent is Anglo-Saxon England. The relatively advanced English coinage of the tenth–eleventh centuries features in most of the Scottish coin hoards, and also provided a model for various other coinages. Imitations of Anglo-Saxon coins were produced in the Scandinavian kingdom of York, and York coins are known from hoards on Orkney, Islay, Skye, Iona, and Man.⁵¹ One should note that a York coin of Óláfr Cuarán forms part of the Iona hoard of *c.* 986, and that Óláfr himself died there in 980. Another figure of importance in Norse Scotland, Eiríkr *blóðöx*, also minted coins at York,⁵² although none are known from Scotland. Thus, in addition to general familiarity with the English penny in Scotland, there were two Norse rulers with Scottish interests who actually had coins minted in their names, even if not in Scotland.

In addition to the York coins, the Anglo-Saxon coinage also spawned imitations in Dublin from *c.* 995 until the 1020s when a more distinctive local style developed.⁵³ Relatively few Hiberno-Norse coins are known from Scottish hoards, but they are common in the hoards of the Isle of Man, where a Hiberno-Manx coinage is thought to have developed in the 1020s–1030s derived from the coins of Sihtric of Dublin, themselves copied from those of Æðelræd II.⁵⁴ These Hiberno-Manx coins are not known from Scottish hoards, and the presence of both Hiberno-Norse and Hiberno-Manx coins in Manx hoards again seems to suggest that Man in the early to mid-eleventh century was in a somewhat different economic situation from the Norse settlements in Scotland.⁵⁵

Anglo-Saxon coins also provided a model for coins in Scandinavia from *c.* 995,⁵⁶ although these Scandinavian imitations do not appear in the Scottish or Manx hoards. Others coins which do appear are Arabic dirhams from the Middle East, and deniers (pennies) from Northern France and Cologne.⁵⁷

In addition to the coins, a further form of supposed ‘currency’ is known from the hoards; the so-called ‘ring-money’. This takes the form of simple

⁵¹ R.H.M. Dolley, *Viking Coins of the Danelaw and of Dublin* (London, 1965), p. 13; Smart, *Penny*, pp. 67–8; Metcalf, *Monetary significance*, pp. 20–2.

⁵² Dolley, *Viking Coins*, pp. 13, 26; P. Grierson, & M. Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 324–5.

⁵³ P. Grierson, *The Coins of Medieval Europe* (London, 1991), p. 72.

⁵⁴ Dolley, *Hiberno-Manx Coinage*, pp. 75, 82; Graham-Campbell, *Isle of Man*, pp. 58 ff.; Metcalf, *Monetary Significance*, pp. 19–24; Bornholdt, *Myth or Mint*, *passim*.

⁵⁵ Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, p. 133.

⁵⁶ K. Skaare, *Coins and Coinage in Viking Age Norway* (Oslo, 1976), pp. 58–60; Grierson, *Coins of Medieval Europe*, p. 73.

⁵⁷ Smart, *Penny*, pp. 67–8; Metcalf, *Monetary significance*, pp. 19–24.

penannular arm-rings, round or lozenge-shaped in section and usually undecorated, although the ends are often deliberately flattened. Graham-Campbell suggests that the origins of ring-money may lie in the Irish Sea region, since the earliest examples which, unlike later ring-money, are decorated, show stylistic similarities with material from hoards at Cuerdale, Lancs. (c. 905) and Dysart Island, Co. Westmeath (c. 907). However, ring-money is most commonly found in the hoards of the Norse settlements in Scotland, with over 90 complete examples, and some 200 fragments known from Scotland, compared with 20 in the Isle of Man and 16–19 in Ireland. Ring-money is rarely found in England or Scandinavia.⁵⁸

Ring money is found in seven coin-dated hoards from Scotland over a period c. 950–c. 1040, and possibly in two other poorly recorded mixed hoards (one as late as c. 1065), as well as five coinless hoards and one single-find. It is known on Man from four hoards and one single-find, between c. 970–c. 1065.⁵⁹ Thus, unlike the Hiberno-Norse and Hiberno-Manx coinage, it does seem to indicate some degree of economic connection between Man and Norse Scotland in the eleventh century,⁶⁰ particularly at the more primitive level of valuation of silver by bullion weight. Ring-money appears in hoards either complete, or deliberately broken up amongst other hack-silver, but it has been argued that it was produced according to an approximate weight-standard. R. Warner, in a study based on 72 examples, calculated a standard unit of 24.0 ± 0.8 gm, with arm-rings varying from 1–5 units in size, and argued that ‘We are quite justified in concluding that the manufacturers of the arm-rings were aiming at this target, although the standard deviation of the production, 5gm, suggests that they were not being too careful about their accuracy.’⁶¹ A subsequent study of Viking Age silver and weights by S. Kruse notes that ‘a large number of rings miss the target, often by a large amount.’ Kruse agrees, however, based on a study of the weight units found in silver ingots, that precise accuracy was not always a requirement of the manufacturers of such bullion currency.⁶²

If one accepts this approximate weight standard, and 24 gm does seem to correspond to one version of the ounce in the Viking Age (see below), there remains the question of the function of this ring-money as currency. Craw-

⁵⁸ Graham-Campbell, *Gold and Silver*, pp. 39–40, 53–4, 57–9.

⁵⁹ Graham-Campbell, *Isle of Man*, pp. 62–3; Graham-Campbell, *Gold and Silver*, *passim*.

⁶⁰ Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, p. 134.

⁶¹ R. Warner, ‘Scottish silver arm-rings: an analysis of weights’, *PSAS* 107, 1975–6, pp. 136–43 (p. 141).

⁶² S.E. Kruse, ‘Ingots and weight units in Viking Age silver hoards’, *World Archaeology* 20:2, 1988, pp. 285–301; S.E. Kruse, ‘Silver Storage and Circulation in Viking-Age Scotland, in *Caitness, Orkney and the North Atlantic*, ed. by C. Batey *et al.*, pp. 187–203 (pp. 193–6).

ford has suggested a possible link between ring-money and the ounce-land assessment, arguing that the fact that the period from which ring-money is known coincides with the height of power of the Orkney earls, and that they had the political power to introduce such a 'state currency', a view criticised by Kruse.⁶³ Crawford further links ring-money with trade, pointing to the situation of the Northern and Western Isles on the trade route between Dublin and Scandinavia, and to the wealth of Norse Scotland during this period (based on the evidence of the hoards), although to keep things in perspective one should note that Norse Scotland has relatively few hoards in comparison with Ireland.⁶⁴

While the link with the Orkney earls seems not unlikely, one must question how useful ring-money would have been for trade. A whole ounce of silver was of considerable value during this period, and arm rings weighing from one to five ounces apiece could only have been used for very large purchases indeed.⁶⁵ Smaller units of silver would have been far more useful for more normal trade, and ring-money could only have served this function when broken up, like any other silver item, into hack silver. While ring-money certainly was sometimes broken up for hack silver, it is difficult to imagine the Orkney earls deliberately aiming to facilitate trade by creating a standardised currency which would have had to be broken up for all but the most substantial purchases. Gaimster, approaching Viking Age silver from an anthropological perspective, argues that rather than reflecting a uniform economy based on weight value, 'coins, bars and ingots, hack-silver and intact jewellery should be seen as representing qualitatively different media, each of which functioned differently',⁶⁶ and it is probably in this light that ring-money should be viewed.

Gaimster refers to Ibn Fadlan's account of the Viking Rus turning Arabic dirhams into neck-rings and points to parallels with Scandinavian gold arm rings in the late Roman period.⁶⁷ In both cases coins fulfilled different functions for the different parties to transactions; the Romans and Arabs used coin to purchase commodities, whereas for the Scandinavian people the coins were themselves a commodity, since they provided the raw material for the production of personal ornaments. The sagas are full of accounts of

⁶³ Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, pp. 133–5; Kruse, *Silver Storage*, pp. 193, 199.

⁶⁴ Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, pp. 128–33; Kruse, *Silver Storage*, pp. 198–200.

⁶⁵ M.M. Archibald of the British Museum suggests that a penny in this period would be roughly equivalent to £25 in modern currency. Well over half the arm-rings studied by Warner (*Silver arm-rings*, p. 141) weighed two ounces or more; by this analogy equivalent to £900–£1000.

⁶⁶ Gaimster, *Money and Media*, p. 115.

⁶⁷ Gaimster, *Money and Media*, p. 117.

ostentatious wealth, and arm-rings were a simple means of parading wealth and status. They also played an important part in social transactions, such as those between a warrior and his lord; 'ring-giving' is a standard sign of generosity in Germanic literature generally, and it is quite likely that the ring-money fulfilled such a function in Norse Scotland. Crawford suggests that 'trade apart ... the main source of wealth in Scandinavian Scotland in the period 975-1025 was probably the rewards of service with earls who maintained conquering and raiding life-styles,'⁶⁸ and ring-money fits more obviously the pattern of distribution by the earls to their followers of plunder and tribute,⁶⁹ than that of economic trade. An approximate weight standard allowed for equitable distribution, and at the same time facilitated the use of the rings for weight-based trade / exchange as a secondary function. Similarly, scales and weights found in pagan Norse graves in Scotland, and in urban excavations elsewhere, may have been used for the equitable distribution of plunder rather than, or as well as, for trade, although the evidence for this is insufficient to draw firm conclusions.⁷⁰

An example of silver functioning on different levels of exchange at this period may be found in *Heimskringla*, which recounts how the *bændr* of Iceland each contributed a 'tribute-penny', equivalent to three weighed pennies of refined silver, which was then converted into a brooch weighing 50 marks to honour the skald Eyvindr *skáldaspillir* for a poem he had written. Such a heavy brooch would obviously have been impractical to wear, and Eyvindr had it broken up, and used it to buy cattle.⁷¹ Thus pennies, valued by weight and silver quality rather than face-value, were converted into a brooch as a status symbol, which was then broken up to be used as a means of exchange again.

The function of hoarding may also be re-evaluated from an anthropological perspective. Hoarding has traditionally been seen as a means of preserving treasure against a perceived threat, except in the context of grave-goods to accompany the deceased into the afterlife. Certainly the peak of hoards in western Scotland and Man during the period of Sigurðr's conquests can be seen as corroboration of this,⁷² while *Orkneyinga saga* records a tradition of Hebrideans burying their moveable goods through fear of the

⁶⁸ Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, pp. 135–6.

⁶⁹ Recent research suggests that military organisation in Norse Scotland at this time was based largely on a plunder / tribute system, rather than a developed system of administration. Williams, *Land Assessment*, pp. 251–67. For further discussion of the hoards in this context, see J. Barrett *et al.*, 'What Was the Viking Age and When did it Happen? A View from Orkney', *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 33:1 (2000), pp. 3–39, at pp. 4–5

⁷⁰ Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, pp. 126.

⁷¹ *Hkr.*, I, *HSGr*, ch. 16, pp. 221–2.

⁷² Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, p. 133.

raids of Sveinn Ásleifarson in the twelfth century,⁷³ although no hoard is known from such a late date. However, this is not the only possible explanation for the deposition of hoards. Gaimster suggests that the burial of wealth might be a preparation for the afterlife even when not directly associated with the burial of the deceased.⁷⁴ Thus a change in hoarding practices might be linked with changes in religious belief. This would fit the chronological framework on a political level, with a decline in hoarding in the eleventh century, just in the period when Christianity was becoming more firmly established under the patronage of Earl Þorfinnr.⁷⁵ However, comparison with pagan burial practice suggests that this is unlikely, with relatively few hoards coinciding with the period of pagan Norse burial (c. 850–c. 950), and the majority of hoards coming after the mid-tenth century, by which time burial practice suggests that the majority of the Norse settlers had converted to Christianity.⁷⁶

Another possibility is that hoarding, like the production of ring-money, may have links with a social structure based on gift-giving and the show of wealth. In *Egils saga*, the elderly Egill hides his accumulated treasure, and disposes of the witnesses, so that the treasure is denied to anyone else. He does this after being denied the opportunity to create a memorable brawl at the *Alþingi* by throwing his silver amongst the crowd.⁷⁷ The ostentatious destruction of such a treasure (of English silver), like its distribution, is a sign of power and wealth. Furthermore, such conspicuous consumption reduces the possibility of rivals accumulating the same degree of wealth and status by removing the contents of the hoard from circulation.⁷⁸ Given that silver was available only in limited supply in Norse Scotland, it seems unlikely that such symbolic destruction could have been widespread there, but individual hoards of outstanding value, such as the Skaill hoard of c. 950–970, may possibly fit this model. R. Samson rejects this explanation of hoarding, but does link hoarding with the gift-giving social economy, suggesting that hoards may represent the gradual accumulation of wealth which could then be used in a notable display and / or distribution of wealth.⁷⁹

Unfortunately, there is no way of proving one of these theories at the expense of the others, and it may be that different hoards represent a combina-

⁷³ OS, ch. 106, p. 284; Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, p. 128.

⁷⁴ Gaimster, *Money and Media*, p. 118.

⁷⁵ Barrett *et al.*, 'Viking Age', p. 5.

⁷⁶ J. Graham-Campbell & C.E. Batey, *Vikings in Scotland: An Archaeological Survey* (Edinburgh, 1998), pp. 152–4, 245.

⁷⁷ *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, ch. 85, pp. 296–8.

⁷⁸ R. Samson, 'Fighting with Silver: Rethinking Trading, Raiding, and Hoarding', in *Social Approaches to Viking Studies*, ed. by R. Samson, pp. 123–33 (pp. 130–1).

⁷⁹ Samson, *Fighting with Silver*, p. 131.

tion of functions, but one must at least accept the possibility that the shift away from hoarding in the eleventh century may reflect more than a shift to a monetary economy,⁸⁰ or the removal of exterior threats which made hiding the treasures necessary. Any final conclusions about the Viking Age silver economy (or any assessment systems based around it) should therefore seek to accommodate possible changes in religion and social structure as well as purely economic developments.

Having established that silver was valued largely by weight, it is necessary to consider briefly the units of weight by which it was measured. From post-Viking-Age Norse sources we know of three basic measures of weight; the mark, the *eyrir* (or ounce), and the *ertog*. There were three *ertugar* to the *eyrir*, and eight *aurar* to the mark.⁸¹ When coins were introduced in the Scandinavian countries they were fitted into the same system, and thus payments in silver continued to be made in marks and *aurar* as, for example, in the various fines specified in twelfth–thirteenth century lawcodes.⁸²

The word *mark* first appears in Scandinavia on a rune stone in the eleventh century, but both *mark* and *ora* appear in Old English as loans from Old Norse by the ninth century.⁸³ The *ertog* does not appear so early but appears to be represented in the archaeological record from the the Viking Age. Thus these three basic measures are those to which any early assessment based on silver is likely to relate. A number of attempts have been made to calculate precisely the weights of the various units, based on a variety of sources. Small hand-held scales, and weights made of lead, iron and bronze are known from Viking Age graves and, more recently, from the excavation of Viking settlements, and these have produced a range of possible figures. Unfortunately, however, the metals used for these weights are subject to surface corrosion which may feasibly either increase or decrease the weight of the object. Thus, one cannot distinguish with certainty whether minor variations in weight between similar items result from original imprecision on the part of the manufacturer, or from the results of corrosion. More reliable results might, however, be expected from precious metals, which are more resistant to corrosion, and studies have been undertaken based on arm-rings in Sweden, Ireland, and Scotland (the so-called ring-money), as well as on silver ingots and hacksilver.

⁸⁰ Gaimster, *Money and Media*, p. 122.

⁸¹ Kruse, *Ingots and weight units*, p. 286. P. Nightingale, 'The Ora, the Mark, and the Mancus: Weight-Standards and the Coinage in Eleventh-Century England', parts 1 & 2, *NC* 143, 1985, pp. 248–57, *NC* 144, 1984, pp. 234–48.

⁸² e.g., *Gulapingslög*, §296, §299–§314.

⁸³ Kruse, *Ingots and weight units*, p. 286.

The results of these various studies reveal broadly similar findings. Studies of lead weights suggest one unit of *c.* 4gm, and another variously described as *c.* 4.25 gm, *c.* 4.26 gm and 4.266 gm.⁸⁴ Both the 4 gm unit and the *c.* 4.25 gm unit seem compatible with two figures for the *ertog*; that of Nielsen (based on weights), at 8.1 ± 0.4 gm, and that of Lundström (based on ingots), at 7.78–8.64 gm.⁸⁵ Thus it may be that two standards existed, representing an *ertog* of *c.* 8 gm and *c.* 8.5 gm respectively, together with a corresponding half-*ertog* unit for each, for which no name is known, but which is widely represented in the archaeological record. A double standard of weights also appears at the level of the *eyrir*: A.W. Brøgger argued that during the early Viking Age the *eyrir* was *c.* 26.5 gm, but that it shifted later to *c.* 24 gm, possibly in imitation of an Anglo-Saxon standard.⁸⁶ This 24 gm unit is consistent with the 4gm half-*ertog*, and is also supported by Warner's analysis of Scottish ring-money at 24.0 ± 0.8 gm. Nielsen's estimate of $24.4 \text{ gm} \pm 0.8$ gm also falls close to this standard.⁸⁷

The standard of 26.5 gm finds support from P. Wallace's estimate (based on weights from Dublin) of 26.6 gm, while early silver arm-rings from Ireland are identified by Sheehan as relating to a standard of 25.9 ± 0.4 gm to $c.$ 27.3 ± 0.9 gm, and by Warner as relating to a target of 26.15 gm. Two lead weights, each of 26.65 gm have recently been recovered from a ninth century Viking boat-burial at Scar on Sanday, Orkney. It is notable, however, that the *eyrir*-unit corresponding to the half-*ertog*-unit of *c.* 4.25 gm would be 25.5 gm, rather than 26.5 gm, and that Kruse, from the evidence of silver ingots from England and Wales finds a unit of 25–26 gm.⁸⁸

However, with several of these estimates a number of the items on which the estimate is based significantly miss the estimated standard. This discrepancy may partially be removed by linking some of them with multiples of the *ertog*-and half-*ertog*, rather than the *eyrir* itself. Thus ring-money finds from the Burray hoard at 16.62 gm and 21.5 gm are consistent with a two *ertog* unit of *c.* 16–17 gm and a two and a half *ertog*-unit of *c.* 20–21.5 gm, and Kruse notes sub-units relating to the *ertog* in larger silver ingots, while weights based on the *ertog*-unit appear to have been used to weigh silver in

⁸⁴ Kruse, *Ingots and weight units*, p. 287.

⁸⁵ Kruse, *Ingots and weight units*, pp. 287, 289.

⁸⁶ A.W. Brøgger, *Ertog og Øre: Den Gamle Norske Vekt* (Kristiania, 1921), pp. 77–85, 102–3.

⁸⁷ Kruse, *Ingots and weight units*, p. 287.

⁸⁸ P.F. Wallace, & R. Ó Floinn, *Dublin 1000: Discovery and Excavation in Dublin, 1842–1981* (Dublin, 1988), p. 24; Kruse, *Ingots and weight units*, pp. 287, 294; O. Owen & M. Dalland, *Scar: A Viking boat burial on Sanday, Orkney* (East Linton, 1999), pp. 118–126; G. Williams, 'Anglo-Saxon and Viking Coin Weights', *British Numismatic Journal* 69 (1999), pp. 19–36.

the Danelaw.⁸⁹ Furthermore, discrepancies in weight between ingots from the same mould indicate a lack of complete metrological stability, and suggest that a certain amount of imprecision was tolerated in the casting process,⁹⁰ which may also account for variations in other artefacts, such as the ring money. If the main purpose of the arm-ring was as a medium for social status, such imprecision would not be particularly important. A slight degree of imprecision must also have been tolerated during transactions involving weighing out silver, whether in coin form or in bullion. Experiments with an early Anglo-Saxon balance show that it is disturbed by a weight of 0.06 gm, tilts through 2 degrees on 0.09 gm, 5 degrees on 0.17 gm, and 10 degrees on 0.23 gm; consistent with tests on Migration-Age balances from Norway, and Viking-Age balances from Sweden. 'This suggests that although accuracy to 0.06 gm could be achieved with care, discrepancies of up to 0.20 gm may have been tolerable.'⁹¹

Thus, the archaeological evidence suggests a number of possibilities: a single standard somewhere in the 24–26.6 gm range, but only very approximately applied; the same single standard, but subject to local variations, or localised production errors; or two separate standards for the *eyrir*; one at c. 24 gm, one at c. 25.5–26.6 gm. Kruse suggests that possibly both units can be identified in the Scottish hoard material, but also states that it is very difficult to determine whether or not the various figures mentioned above do genuinely represent separate metrological units.⁹²

Having identified a possible standard, or standards for the *eyrir*, or ounce, one must also consider the possible relationship of ounces and pennies, and especially whether any such relationship seems to correspond with the groupings of 18 or 20 pennylands to the ounce-land. McKerral (following the argument that the ounce-land / pennyland system dated from c. 900) suggested that the difference between the ounce-land of 18 pennylands and that of 20 pennylands reflected the usage of different ounces in northern and western Scotland. He argued that the western ounce-lands corresponded to an English ounce of 450 grains [c. 26.5 gm], equivalent to 20 pennies @ 22.5 grains each, while the northern ounce-lands corresponded to a Norse ounce of 412.58 grains [c. 24.25 gm], roughly equivalent to 18 pennies @ 22.5 grains each. Recognising the need for an explanation of the use of two separate ounces, he suggested familiarity with the English ounce established in the Hebrides and mainland Scotland in the pre-Norse period, but not in

⁸⁹ Warner, *Scottish Silver Arm-Rings*, p. 141; Kruse, *Ingots and weight units*, p. 294.

⁹⁰ Kruse, *Ingots and weight units*, pp. 295–7.

⁹¹ C. Scull, 'Scales and Weights in Early Anglo-Saxon England', *Archaeological Journal* 147 (1990), pp. 183–215.

⁹² Kruse, *Silver Storage*, p. 195.

the Northern Isles.⁹³ However, as discussed earlier, the date of *c.* 900 can no longer be readily accepted for the introduction of the ounceland system. A later date of introduction makes the survival of a 'pre-Norse' measure less likely, and he does not in any case explain why this measure should be familiar in the west of Scotland but not in the north, a view now disproven by the weights from Scar (see above). There is also the problem that while 450 grains divides exactly into 20 pennies of 22.5 grains each, 412.58 grains gives *c.* 18.33 pennies rather than 18 exactly. While one should not expect complete metrological accuracy for this period, it seems odd that the one relationship should be so exact but the other much less so. There is a further problem, indicated by Megaw, that at such an early date the English ounce was apparently divided into 16 pennies.⁹⁴

Before dismissing the idea, however, one should note that McKerral's figures for the English and Norse ounces come close to the two ounces postulated from the archaeological record (*c.* 26.5 gm and *c.* 24 gm). If one adjusts his 'Norse ounce' downwards slightly to 24 gm, it fits more closely to 18 pennies, and the two established ounce units then stand more closely in a ratio of *c.* 20:18. If one takes Wallace's unit of 26.6 gm, the ratio is accurate to within 0.01 gm, with a penny of *c.* 1.33 gm. Again, one must doubt that measurements were so precise, but the fact that the two postulated units stand in such a ratio does provide a possible explanation of the regional difference in the ounceland / pennyland ratio.

The problem remains, however, of whether such a ratio of pennies to the ounce existed. S. Harvey has argued that from the reign of Æðelræd to the 12th century, there was a constant relationship of 16 pennies to the ounce, with the exception of references in Domesday Book to payments *de xx in ora*. This Domesday reference to 20 pennies to the ounce is explained by Harvey as an accounting device used by the king to compensate for a potential loss of income as a result of the minting of lighter coins, which was continued as a royal prerogative even when no longer necessary, following the restoration of a heavier coinage.⁹⁵ However, this argument does require that at some point there must have been a relationship of 20 of these lighter coins to the ounce, which thus contradicts Harvey's initial suggestion of metrological stability and continuity from the reign of Æðelræd to the 12th century.

⁹³ A. McKerral, 'The Lesser Land and Administrative Divisions in Celtic Scotland', *PSAS* (1950–1), pp. 52–64 (pp. 56–7).

⁹⁴ Megaw, *Pennyland and Davach*, pp. 75–6.

⁹⁵ S. Harvey, 'Royal Revenue and Domesday Terminology', *EcHR* 20 (1967), pp. 221–8.

Such stability and continuity have been questioned by P. Nightingale of weights and currency from the late tenth to late eleventh century. This study again features two slightly different ounces, this time of 24.5 gm and 27 gm,⁹⁶ once more very close to the units known from the archaeological material. Nightingale, while allowing for regional and chronological minor variations (and suggesting a degree of tolerance of inaccuracy which accords with that postulated by Kruse in the production of ingots etc.), offers a rather more complex pattern of the relationship between penny and ounce in England during this period, which can be summarised as follows:

<i>Eadgar to Æðelræd</i>	1 penny = <i>c.</i> 1.53 gm 16 pennies = 1 ounce = <i>c.</i> 24.5 gm
<i>c. 1017–26</i>	1 penny = <i>c.</i> 1.02 gm 24 pennies = 1 ounce = <i>c.</i> 24.5 gm 8 ounces = 1 mark = <i>c.</i> 196 gm
<i>c. 1026–51</i>	1 penny = <i>c.</i> 1.12 gm 24 pennies = 1 ounce = 27 gm 8 ounces = 1 mark = 216 gm
<i>1051–77</i>	1 penny = <i>c.</i> 1.33 gm <i>de xx in ora</i> 20 pennies = 1 ounce = 27 gm 8 ounces = 1 mark = 216 gm
<i>c. 1077</i>	1 penny = <i>c.</i> 1.39 gm ⁹⁷

Thus from 1051 onwards, there was a relationship in England between the ounce and the penny which corresponds to the ratio of pennyland to ounceland found in western Scotland. From this one could proceed to argue that if the heavier ounce of *c.* 26.5–27 gm had indeed been introduced into western Scotland by the mid-eleventh century, but not into the north, then the same penny of *c.* 1.33 gm would give a ratio of 18 pennies to the lighter ounce of *c.* 24–24.5 gm. However, this seems unlikely since the weights from Scar indicate that the heavier weight was known in the north well before the mid-eleventh century. A further possibility would be the Nightin-

⁹⁶ P. Nightingale, 'The Ora, the Mark, and the Mancus: Weight-Standards and the Coinage in Eleventh-Century England, parts 1&2, *NC* 143 (1985), pp. 248–57, *NC* 144 (1984), pp. 234–48.

⁹⁷ Nightingale, *Ora, Mark and Mancus* II, p. 246.

gale's penny of Eadgar to Æðelræd at 1.53 gm, combined with the heavier ounce of c. 26.5–27 gm, which would give an approximate relationship of 18 pennies to the ounce, matching the uncencland / pennyland ratio in northern Scotland. However, Nightingale's figure does not take account of the considerable variations in weight from type to type (the coin type changed every few years) in the course of the period, and while a standard of c. 1.5 gm existed intermittently, it is unlikely to have had a marked effect in Norse Scotland, where coins of different date and origin seem to have mixed freely.⁹⁸

It is thus possible to establish two possible standards for the ounce of the uncencland, but not to establish a satisfactory relationship between ounce and Anglo-Saxon penny which corresponds to the 18 pennyland system of the earldom of Orkney, while the relationship of 20 pennies to the ounce of western Scotland only corresponds with Anglo-Saxon coinage from the 1050s. An alternative to the Anglo-Saxon penny will, however, be considered later in the context of political authority.

Turning to structures of landholding, the importance of the 'household' unit has already been mentioned: the *tech* of Dál Riata, the quarterland of Man, and the pennyland of Orkney have all been linked by historians with a broader pattern of 'household' units elsewhere. This pattern extends not simply to the rest of Britain but more widely through North-West Europe. Similar units can be found in England, Ireland, Wales, and Francia.

These units have two main features in common; that they represent the amount of land necessary to support one 'family' (an extended family including servants and dependants as well as blood-kin), and that they are seen to some extent as heritable, even though they may form part of a larger estate. The latter aspect is stressed in Latin *mansus*, the name given to such units in Francia,⁹⁹ and also applied in Latin to the household unit in England. In Old English, however, the term *hið* stresses the family aspect, reinforced by Bede's use of Latin *terra familiae* apparently to represent the same unit. This is paralleled in both Welsh and Irish.¹⁰⁰

The similarity between different areas extends beyond the 'household' unit. Jones points to similarities between groupings of household units in England and Wales, to suggest an hierarchical structure of land units, based

⁹⁸ For weight distributions within each type, see H.B.A. Petersson, *Anglo-Saxon Currency. King Edgar's Reform to the Norman Conquest* (Lund, 1969), pp. 179–214.

⁹⁹ D. Herlihy, 'The Carolingian *Mansus*', *EcHR* 13 (1960–1), pp. 79–89.

¹⁰⁰ T.M. Charles-Ewards, 'Kinship, Status, and the Origins of the Hide', *Past and Present* 56 (1972), pp. 3–33 (pp. 6–7).

on Romano-British foundations. In Jones' model, based on the thirteenth century Book of Iorwerth, 'household' units were grouped into multiple estates, which in turn were grouped into larger units. The Welsh system grouped households into the *maenol* (multiple estate) of four, the *commote* of fifty, and the *cantref* of a hundred.¹⁰¹ This shows similarities with the English system, within which the five-hide unit was the standard property qualification of the *thegn*, and in which households were also grouped into nominal hundreds.¹⁰² This pattern again extends to Ireland, with the property requirements for different grades of nobility being counted in different multiples of five households, and Bannerman points to the apparent similarity between the system in Ireland, and that implied by the record of the number of houses attributed to different septs in Dál Riata in the *Senchus fer nAlban*. The *Senchus* also specifically mentions a *cet treb* in Islay, which appears directly cognate to the Welsh *cantref*.¹⁰³ Barrow argues that the shires and thanage system of eastern Scotland, which he attributes to Northumbrian influence on the Pictish kingdom, should also be seen in this light.¹⁰⁴

A further feature of this model is the royal vill (Welsh *maerdref*). This was a mensal farm, the produce of which directly provided for the lord, but which also served as a collection point for renders from other farms in the same grouping of estates; both rents from other farms owned by the lord, and taxation in kind from those owned privately.¹⁰⁵

If this model really represents a North-West European pattern of landholding and social structure, one might expect to find it in Scandinavia as well. Certainly the idea of the household unit, extending beyond the household's family to include his dependants, is one which can be identified in the Norwegian laws,¹⁰⁶ as well as in the Icelandic sagas. The *bóndi* appears very similar to the Anglo-Saxon *ceorl* or the Irish *ocaire*, in that his status as a 'free' farmer was linked to his tenure of land. Thus, Norse settlers moving into an area in which the 'household' unit already existed could probably

¹⁰¹ G.R.J. Jones, 'Multiple Estates and Early Settlement', in P.H. Sawyer (ed.), *Early Medieval Settlement* (2nd edition, London, 1979), pp. 15–40; W. Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1982), pp. 43–6.

¹⁰² Jones, *Multiple Estates*, *passim*.

¹⁰³ Bannerman, *Dalriada*, pp. 132–43.

¹⁰⁴ G.W.S. Barrow, *The Kingdom of the Scots* (London, 1973), pp. 57–68; R.A. Dodgshon, *Land and Society in Early Scotland* (1981), pp. 58–73.

¹⁰⁵ Jones, *Multiple Estates*, p. 15; Barrow, *Kingdom*, p. 59; Dodgshon, *Land and Society*, pp. 62–3.

¹⁰⁶ P.S. Andersen, 'When was Regular, Annual Taxation Introduced in the Norse Islands of Britain? A Comparative Study of Assessment Systems in North-Western Europe', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 16 (1991), pp. 73–83 (p. 76).

adapt to it easily, as something familiar. However, the system in Scandinavia does not seem to have been tied into land assessment in the same way; 'household' units do not appear to have been standardised in the Viking Age, nor is there evidence for multiple estates and hundred groupings in the same way.¹⁰⁷

Does such a model fit in Norse Scotland? Certainly such a system seems to have existed in Dál Riata, and accepting that the 20-pennyland unit in western Scotland derives from the 20-house unit of Dál Riata, the pennyland of western Scotland must therefore represent a 'household' unit. To some extent this pattern can be seen in the prevalence of 5-pennyland units in the west, even beyond the bounds of Dál Riata.¹⁰⁸ In Orkney, Thomson has argued that 'since there was a total of about 3,670 pennylands, and since at the height of nineteenth century expansion Orkney had 3,373 agricultural holdings, it is useful as a very rough guide to think of the pennyland as being more or less equivalent to a small household unit.'¹⁰⁹ The land system of the Isle of Man shows distinct similarities with that of Gwynedd, especially Anglesey, and apparently fits the model quite closely.¹¹⁰

However, while the multiple estate model takes small units and gathers them together into progressively larger units, ouncelands and pennylands suggest a system which starts from large units and sub-divides into smaller units. It has been suggested that Orkney was originally divided into 192 ouncelands, relating to a total tax of 3 gold marks.¹¹¹ The division of the earldom into thirds or sixths, then into parishes (or possibly pre-parochial districts), then into ouncelands and pennylands represents a downward model, while the multiple estate system represents an upward model. One could be superimposed onto the other, but the origins would be very different. A downward model also makes sense of the Orkney skatland, or quarter-ounceland. As a grouping of four and a half pennylands, the skatland is odd, but as a division of an ounce into four it makes perfect sense, although it implies a division made at a different time from the division into eighteen pennylands (see below).

¹⁰⁷ Although the term *hundare* is known, and was accepted for a long time as early, more recent work on state formation has led to the conclusion that such hundreds were a later introduction. T. Lindkvist, 'Social and Political Power in Sweden 1000–1300: Predatory Incursions, Royal Taxation, and the Formation of a Feudal State', in R. Samson (ed.), *Social Approaches to Viking Studies* (Glasgow, 1991), pp. 137–45 (pp. 139, 145).

¹⁰⁸ Easson, *Land Assessment*, pp. 40–1.

¹⁰⁹ W.P.L. Thomson, *History of Orkney* (Edinburgh, 1987), p. 116.

¹¹⁰ Megaw, *Norseman and Native*, p. 23; Reilly, *Medieval Land Divisions*, pp. 27–8, 38–43.

¹¹¹ Thomson, *History of Orkney*, p. 118.

If one looks at ouncelands and pennylands in terms of sub-division, it is possible to propose an alternative model; one of townships (*i.e.*, groups of neighbouring farms which share an element of common identity, rather than nuclear settlements) and sharelands. Thomson has argued that while individual ouncelands can often be identified, individual pennylands often cannot.¹¹² An individual township would be assessed at a certain number of pennylands (reflecting the division of an ounceland assessment amongst different townships), and the different pennyland holdings within that township do not necessarily represent actual parcels of land within the township, but shares in the land of the township as a whole, farmed commonally in runrig. This share entitled the holder to a set proportion of what the land could provide (not only arable land, but rights to grazing, driftage, etc), but also made the holder liable to the same proportion of any dues demanded of the township.¹¹³

This system, flexibly applied in the Orkneys (there is no standardisation to the size of townships, either in acreage or in ounce / penny assessment) finds parallels elsewhere. The Shetland *skattald* worked on precisely this principle.¹¹⁴ The Scottish *dabhach* has also been viewed in the context of townships, and was often subdivided, although generally more rigidly into quarters and, less commonly, eighths.¹¹⁵ Again, rights such as pasturing are closely associated with the arable *dabhach* (many charter references specify rights to a *dabhach* estate *cum fortyris* ('with pastures'), and holdings of *dabhachs* and their sub-divisions can easily be interpreted in terms of shares within a township. One should note in this context that the term *dabhach*, like ounceland, implies a specific render which could then be subdivided. The Irish *baile biataigh*, to which the *dabhach* is often likened, also represents a township which was sub-divided.¹¹⁶

Earlier in this paper, the *dabhach* assessment was provisionally dated to the tenth-eleventh centuries, although this may represent the superimposition of the assessment on to existing estates. The Irish *baile* has also

¹¹² Thomson, *Ouncelands and Pennylands*, p. 25.

¹¹³ Thomson, *Ouncelands and Pennylands*, p. 25; *ibid.*, 'Settlement Patterns at Tuquoy, Westray', *Northern Studies* 27 (1990), pp. 35–49 (p. 44). A similarity may be observed here with the Norwegian *ölgerð* and *manngerð* (Williams, *Land Assessment*, pp. 167–8). For a more general comment on the levying of dues on a township, see McKerral, *What was a dabhach?*, pp. 51–2.

¹¹⁴ B. Smith, 'What is a Skattald?', in *Essays in Shetland History*, ed. by B.E. Crawford (Lerwick, 1984), pp. 99–124 (pp. 100–4).

¹¹⁵ McKerral, *What is a dabhach?*, pp. 50–1; Easson, *Land Assessment*, pp. 58–61, 69.

¹¹⁶ Skene, *Celtic Scotland*, III, p. 227; McKerral, *Ancient Denominations*, pp. 45; McKerral, *Administrative Divisions*, p. 55.

recently been re-assigned to much the same date.¹¹⁷ This may indicate a widespread change in the nature of landholding during this period. Abels, working largely from tenth and eleventh century sources, interprets the English hideage system in terms of tribute assessment, rather than 'household' units,¹¹⁸ and it may be that a similar change also took place in England at this period, with the hide changing gradually from a nominal 'household' unit to a measure of fiscal capacity. While the evidence is far from conclusive, it is tempting to see the ounceland assessment as a similar development of the same period. This is consistent with the dating already suggested on the basis of the silver economy.

The Orkney rentals are a very imprecise guide to the size and nature of estates in the tenth and eleventh centuries, since it is generally accepted that many of the categories of land described reflect changes in lordship in the later Middle Ages.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, a number of large estates remain in the rentals, often connected with the *bus* which Clouston identified as the power centres of the earls and other chieftains.¹²⁰ Other large estates, although broken up into smaller tenancies by the time of the rentals, can sometimes be reconstructed.¹²¹

Two patterns of settlement can be suggested as being established by the period at which assessment in ounces and pennies were introduced. The first involves large estates, whether owned by the earls or by chieftains. Such estates, generally those identified as *bus*, were sufficiently large not to require pennyland sub-division; they were assessed at half an ounceland, a whole ounceland, or even larger.¹²² Many of these estates probably remained intact at the end of the twelfth century, at which time the skatland assessment may well have been introduced by king Sverrir of Norway after the battle of Flóruvágur, in which a number of Orkney chieftains supported

¹¹⁷ C. Docherty, 'The Vikings in Ireland: a Review', in *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age*, ed. by H.B. Clarke, M. Ní Mhaonaigh & R. Ó Floinn (Dublin, 1998), pp. 288–330.

¹¹⁸ R.P. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1988), pp. 100–3. According to Abels, however, this change had already taken place by the late seventh century.

¹¹⁹ J.S. Clouston, 'The Orkney Lands', *POAS* 2 (1923–4), pp. 61–8; *ibid.*, *Orkney*, pp. 151–4; Thomson, *Ouncelands and Pennylands*, p. 129; *ibid.*, *History of Orkney*, p. 29; *ibid.*, *Settlement in Orkney*, pp. 341–2; *ibid.*, *Lord Henry Sinclair's 1492 Rental of Orkney* (Kirkwall, 1996), pp. xix–xx.

¹²⁰ A. Peterkin (ed.), *Rentals of the Earldom of the Ancient Earldom and Bishopric of Orkney* (Edinburgh, 1820), *passim*; Thomson, *Sinclair's 1492 Rental*, *passim*; Clouston, *Orkney*, pp. 16–20, 169–81.

¹²¹ Thomson, *Settlement at Tuquoy*, *passim*; *ibid.*, *Settlement in Orkney*, pp. 340–7.

¹²² e.g. the six 18-pennyland 'bordland' *bus* of Sanday, some of which had at some point formed parts of even larger estates of up to 4 ouncelands. Clouston, *The Orkney 'Bus'*, p. 42; Thomson, *Settlement in Orkney*, p. 346.

an alternative candidate to the Norwegian throne, with the approval, or at the least the compliance of Earl Haraldr Maddaðarson of Orkney.¹²³ As a direct consequence, according to the near contemporary *Böglunga saga*, *da skulde ald Landgilde oc Sagefald aff Ørknøi oc Hetland falde til Kongen i Norrig, oc Kongen sette sin Fogit ved Naffn Arne Løria met Grefuen i Ørknøi*.¹²⁴ It is likely that the great chieftains involved, and the earl himself, would be punished by forfeiture of lands, and even those lands not seized would be assessed for *Landgilde*. Thus the division into quarters would have taken place on estates which, while assessed in uncenclands, had never been subdivided into pennylands, and there was consequently no awkwardness about a unit of four and a half pennylands.

The second pattern involves townships, with the uncencland assessment arbitrarily divided amongst the different townships as an approximate measure of fiscal capacity. Some of these may also originally have been large estates, now broken up into shareland holdings, while others were probably always small farms.¹²⁵ The pennylands represent shares within these townships, and while there are many exceptions, there does seem to be a clear tendency towards pennyland groupings representing thirds, sixths, twelfths and even twenty-fourths of an uncencland,¹²⁶ perhaps indicating an initial subdivision on the basis of fractions of an *ertog* before the introduction of the pennyland.

Thus archaeological evidence for silver economy and historical evidence for patterns of landholding point to similar conclusions for the dating of assessment in uncenclands and pennylands. In both cases, an origin in the tenth or eleventh centuries seems likely. While the archaeological evidence suggests that assessment in ounces might well predate assessment in pennies, the historical evidence is too thin to provide firm support for this, although it is completely consistent with this position. However, before assigning

¹²³ This incident and its likely consequences are discussed more fully in Williams, *Land Assessment*, pp. 112–4.

¹²⁴ H. Magerøy, ed., *Soga om Birkebeinar og Baglar; Böglunga Sögur* (2 vols), *Norrøne Tekster no. 5* (Oslo, 1988), ii, p. 120. ‘Then should all the land dues and legal fines of Orkney and Shetland fall to the king in Norway, and the king set his steward, by the name of Arni Løria, with the earl in Orkney.’ This version of the saga survives only in a later copy of the original manuscript.

¹²⁵ This emphasis on original large estates challenges the traditional image of a commonwealth of small *óðal* farmers, but a thorough study of this issue lies beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, such traditional views have been increasingly questioned for other countries in recent years. Thomson, *Settlement at Tuquoy*, p. 36 and note 15. S. Gissel *et al.* argue (*Desertion and Land Colonization*, p. 94) that the settlement pattern in Norway in the High Middle Ages was dominated by individual farms, sometimes divided into 2 or 3 holdings.

¹²⁶ *i.e.*, 3-farthing lands. Williams, *Land Assessment*, pp. 35, 39.

ouncelands and pennylands to the tenth–eleventh centuries, it is necessary to consider the political situation in this period.

As mentioned above, the Norse settlements in Scotland were divided between two main political entities, the earldom of Orkney and the kingdom of Man and the Isles. In the eleventh century and later the kings of Norway claimed overlordship of both areas.¹²⁷ Saga-tradition claims that this overlordship dated back to the conquests of Haraldr *inn hárfagri*, c. 900, but doubts about the authenticity of Haraldr's exploits have already been mentioned. Whatever the origins of the Norwegian claims, they were pressed more aggressively from the eleventh century, but it was not until the reign of Magnús *berfættr* at the end of the century that a Norwegian ruler exercised any real authority in the area. Magnús' exploits are recorded in a variety of British and Irish sources as well as in saga tradition, and although there are problems both with the chronology and the precise details of Magnús' supposed activities, he briefly exercised direct rule over both the Orkney earldom and the kingdom of the Isles, including parts of the western seaboard of the Scottish mainland, and possibly Galloway.¹²⁸ In this he is almost unique amongst Norwegian kings, and thus well placed to introduce the ounceland / pennyland system. However, his rule was both brief and, apparently, unwelcome, and the sources suggests a greater interest in plundering his new dominions than in establishing firm systems of royal administration.¹²⁹ Nevertheless the possibility of his involvement with ouncelands and pennylands cannot be excluded. From the mid-twelfth century onwards, a number of Norwegian kings were able to exact tribute intermittently from the rulers of Orkney and / or Man,¹³⁰ but it was only in the reign of Hákon the Old in the thirteenth century that a Norwegian ruler seems to have exercised any prolonged authority over all the Norse settlements in Scotland. However, it was not until the 1230s that he exercised much authority outside Norway, by which time his vassals in Man and the Isles were increasingly tied into political relations with the kings of Scotland and England. Although Hákon launched an expedition in 1263 to reassert Norwegian authority in the west, this was ultimately unsuccessful, and following his death

¹²⁷ For a more systematic assessment of the likelihood of individual rulers of Norway, Orkney, and Man and the Isles introducing the ounceland assessment, see Williams, *Land Assessment*, pp. 91–155.

¹²⁸ R. Power, 'Magnus Barelegs' Expeditions to the West', *SHR* 65 (1986), pp. 107–32.

¹²⁹ Williams, *Land Assessment*, pp. 106–9.

¹³⁰ A.O. Johnsen, 'The payments from the Hebrides and the Isle of Man to the crown of Norway 1153–1263: Annual ferme or feudal casualty?', *SHR* 48 (1969), pp. 18–34; Andersen, *Regular annual taxation, passim*.

in Orkney in 1263, Norwegian authority in Man and western Scotland was lost for good, with the kingdom of Man and the Isles formally ceded to Scotland by the Treaty of Perth in 1266. Under the circumstances, it seems extremely unlikely that he could have been responsible for the introduction of a lasting assessment system across so much of western Scotland.

The lack of a suitable Norwegian figure of authority makes it more likely that ouncelands and pennylands were introduced by a local ruler or rulers. Since both ouncelands and pennylands span both the earldom of Orkney and the kingdom of Man and the Isles, this limits the possibilities even further, since no king of the Isles ever ruled in Orkney,¹³¹ and few earls of Orkney ruled in the west. In fact, only two emerge as real possibilities. Interestingly, both fit the date bracket of the tenth–eleventh centuries established by the hoard evidence and the interpretation of structures of land-holding.

For the earldom of Orkney itself, there can be no certainty concerning the origins of the ounceland. While it is likely that an earl of Orkney extended the ounceland assessment to western Scotland and Man, that does not mean that the earl who did so necessarily introduced the ounceland within the Orkney earldom. It is perfectly possible that a system already well established in Orkney could have been extended westwards at a later date. Unfortunately, while *Orkneyinga saga* can probably be relied on to provide the names and family relationship of the tenth-century earls, for this period it offers no information which suggests any one earl as more likely than any of the rest to have introduced an assessment system based on ounces within Orkney itself. Since the archaeological evidence would permit the introduction of an ounce-based assessment at any point in the tenth century, there is absolutely nothing to indicate which of the Orkney earls was responsible for the introduction of the system.

The extension of the ounceland assessment is a different matter. While the documentary sources do not mention land assessment specifically, they do reveal two earls of Orkney who stand out by the extent of their power. The area apparently ruled by Sigurðr Hlöðvisson corresponds closely with the distribution of the ounceland assessment, while that ruled by his son Þorfinnr hinn ríki corresponds closely to the pennyland distribution.

Sigurðr Hlöðvisson is an interesting figure, but one for whom the evidence is less than reliable. Although it is clear that a substantial tradition concerning him survived in thirteenth-century Iceland, little of this is pre-

¹³¹ Rögnvald Guðrøðsson of Man briefly ruled Caithness in the late twelfth century on behalf of William I of Scotland, but he never controlled Orkney, nor indeed a large part of the Western Isles and the western seaboard. Williams, *Land Assessment*, pp. 150–1.

served in either *Orkneyinga saga* or in the kings' sagas. There are, however, a number of interesting references in the *Íslendinga sögur*, notably *Njáls saga*, *Eyrbyggja saga*, and *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar*, as well as in the twelfth-century Irish text the *Cogadh Gaedhel Re Gallaidh* (The War of the Gall and the Gael), which seem to agree to some extent with references in the Irish Annals, as well as with such information as *Orkneyinga saga* does provide.¹³²

Both *Orkneyinga saga* and the longer *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (which are here the same text) tell that Sigurðr was a powerful chieftain with wide dominions, who held Caithness against the Scots by force, and had an army out every summer, with which he harried in the Hebrides, Scotland and Ireland. There follows an account of a battle at *Skíðamýri* against *Finnleikr Skotajarl*,¹³³ probably Findlaech, mormaer of Moray, and this battle seems to justify the claim that he held Caithness by force. *Njáls saga* adds the information that Sigurðr held these lands in Scotland; *Ros ok Myræfi*, *Syðri-lönd ok Dali*.¹³⁴ Although the 'Dales' here have been thought to be the coastal valleys of Argyll, this may be a reference to the Dales of Caithness; the term is used in *Orkneyinga saga* for the location of a battle in Caithness between Sigurðr's uncles Ljótr and Skúli.¹³⁵ *Njáls saga* also records Sigurðr's retainers raiding in the Hebrides, Anglesey, Kintyre, Man, and *Bretland* (probably, in the context, Strathclyde).¹³⁶ They twice fought with King Guðrøðr of Man (whose existence is attested in Welsh and Irish annals¹³⁷), defeated him and carried off *mikit fé*.¹³⁸ While the word *fé* is very broad, *Eyrbyggja saga* is far more precise; there too Sigurðr is recorded as raiding in the Hebrides and Man, and *Hann lagði gjald á Manarbyggðina. Ok er þeir höfðu sæzk, setti jarl eptir menn at biða skattsins, en hann var mest goldinn í brenndu silfri*.¹³⁹ Thus we have a specific account of a tribute

¹³² Although the *Cogadh* was in the past regarded as a document of the early eleventh century, and thus a near contemporary record, it is now regarded as a propagandist work of the early twelfth century (H.A. Jeffries, *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaidh* in *Medieval Scandinavia: an Encyclopedia*, ed. by P. Pulsiano et al. (New York & London, 1993)). It is thus unreliable, but since it apparently draws on earlier sources and, although textually independent, appears to agree on many details with the sagas, it cannot safely be ignored.

¹³³ *OS*, ch. 11, p. 24; *ÓsTM*, I, ch. 97, p. 217.

¹³⁴ *NS*, ch. 86, pp. 206–7. 'Ross and Moray, Sutherland and the Dales.'

¹³⁵ Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, p. 65; *OS*, ch. 10, p. 23.

¹³⁶ *NS*, ch. 86, p. 208; ch. 89, p. 224.

¹³⁷ A survey of his appearance in the sources can be found in Williams, *Land Assessment*, pp. 142–3.

¹³⁸ 'Great booty'.

¹³⁹ *Eyrbyggja saga*, ed. E. Ól. Sveinsson & M. Þórðarson (Reykjavík, 1935), ch. 29, pp. 76–7. 'He imposed tribute on the inhabited lands of Man. And when they had come to terms, the earl set men behind [him] to wait for the tax, and that was mostly paid in refined silver.'

assessed (presumably by weight) in refined silver; a likely circumstance for the introduction of the ounce-land assessment, and both Crawford and Thomson have suggested that Sigurðr's conquests may provide a context for the extension of the ounce-land system from Orkney to the west of Scotland.¹⁴⁰

The accounts given in *Njáls saga* and *Eyrbyggja saga* are of individual raids, rather than permanent rule,¹⁴¹ but *Njáls saga* refers to a tributary earl Gilli of Colonsay or Coll, who married Sigurðr's sister Nereið or Hvarflöð, and who may have acted as a permanent viceroy for Sigurðr in the Hebrides.¹⁴² An impression of the extent of Sigurðr's dominions is also given by the twelfth-century *Cogadh Gaedhel Re Gallaídh*, which describes Sigurðr's following at the battle of Clontarf in 1014 as an army of 'foreigners from the Orc islands and the Cat islands; from Manann and from Sci, and from Leodhus, from Cenn Tire and from Aire-gaedhel',¹⁴³ a list which corresponds closely to the ounce-land distribution. Sigurðr's importance is testified to in the various traditions surrounding Clontarf including the Irish Annals,¹⁴⁴ and by *Orkneyinga saga's* assertion of a marriage alliance with 'Malcolm, king of the Scots', who has been identified with Malcolm II.¹⁴⁵ While there are no specific references either to land assessment units or to administrative systems during his reign, Sigurðr must be considered a strong possibility for the extension of the ounce-land system throughout Norse Scotland. The distribution of the penny-land fits less well with his alleged dominions, and there is little evidence for a coin-based economy during this period, so it is less likely (though still possible) that he was responsible for the introduction of the penny-land assessment.

Sigurðr's son Þorfinnr became probably the most powerful of all the earls of Orkney. Our knowledge of him comes almost exclusively from saga evidence which lacks direct corroboration, but *Orkneyinga saga* portrays him as a very powerful figure. *Orkneyinga saga's* account of his victories as far down as Fife¹⁴⁶ may be based on a genuine tradition, but it is unlikely that these were lasting conquests (although he may have had considerable

¹⁴⁰ Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, p. 90; Thomson, *Ounce-lands and Penny-lands*, pp. 29, 34.

¹⁴¹ Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, p. 65.

¹⁴² *NS*, ch. 89, p. 224; ch. 154, p. 440. On Gilli, see Williams, *Land Assessment*, pp. 143–4.

¹⁴³ *Cogadh Gaedhel Re Gallaibh: The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill*, ed. & trans. by J.H. Todd, London 1867, pp. 152–3. See n. 134 for the problems of the *Cogadh's* reliability.

¹⁴⁴ Although most sources also refer to a powerful viking leader from the Isles, Bróðir, who is not mentioned in *OS*. See Williams, *Land Assessment*, pp. 144–5.

¹⁴⁵ Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, p. 64.

¹⁴⁶ *OS*, ch. 20, p. 51.

authority in mainland Scotland north of the Moray Firth), and the comment that *Hann eignaðisk níu jarldóma á Skotlandi ok allar Suðreyjar ok mikit ríki á Írlandi*¹⁴⁷ is almost certainly an over-statement, given that he is not mentioned in Scottish or Irish sources. More plausible are the saga accounts of his rule in the Hebrides, especially since the saga makes it clear that this dominion was not achieved or maintained without trouble; he supposedly recognised his nephew Rögnvaldr Brúsason as joint earl with himself because he needed his help with the Hebrideans,¹⁴⁸ and later sent his ally Kálfr Árnason to rule the Hebrides on his behalf.¹⁴⁹ The saga also notes that his rule was thought oppressive in the lands which he had conquered, and that on his death these lands broke away under their hereditary rulers.¹⁵⁰ The image the saga portrays is thus one of military conquest, maintained by force. For this to have been worthwhile, he must have received some form of tribute from the conquered areas, and the development of a permanent and regularised system of tribute / taxation seems not unlikely in the context of his long reign. While *Orkneyinga saga* is clearly confused in attributing to him a reign of seventy years,¹⁵¹ he probably established his conquests in the course of the 1020s and continued to rule (including eight years of joint rule with Rögnvaldr¹⁵²) until *ofanverðum dögum Haralds Sigurðarsonar*; probably some time in the 1060s.¹⁵³

The extent of his rule in the west is uncertain. A verse attributed to his contemporary, Arnórr Þórðarson, credits him with ruling *frá Þursaskerjum ... til Dyflinnar*,¹⁵⁴ but it is unlikely that he had any lasting authority over Dublin, since Irish sources record a number of other rulers there during this period. In this context, it is interesting that Þorfinnr is nowhere specifically credited with ruling the Isle of Man, which also seems to have fallen under the influence of a succession of rulers linked with Dublin during this period.¹⁵⁵

Apart from the breadth of his dominions, what makes the rule of Þorfinnr particularly interesting is the scope for external influences on administration during his reign. Þorfinnr himself is said by the sagas to have been

¹⁴⁷ *OS*, ch. 32, p. 81. 'He acquired nine earldoms in Scotland, and all the Western Isles, and a great realm in Ireland.'

¹⁴⁸ *OS*, ch. 22, p. 57.

¹⁴⁹ *OS*, ch. 27, p. 70.

¹⁵⁰ *OS*, ch. 32, p. 82.

¹⁵¹ *OS*, ch. 32, p. 82.

¹⁵² *OS*, ch. 22, p. 58.

¹⁵³ *OS*, ch. 32, p. 82. 'Towards the end of the days of Harald Sigurðarson'.

¹⁵⁴ *OS*, ch. 32, p. 81. 'From Thursakerries ... to Dublin'. 'Thursakerries' may refer to skerries off the north of Shetland (Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, pp. 75–6).

¹⁵⁵ Duffy, *Irishmen and Islesmen*, pp. 93–101.

brought up as a child in Scotland, under the influence of his grandfather 'Malcolm, King of Scots' (see above). The earliest reference to the Scottish *dabhach* is in a grant of Malcolm II (1005-64),¹⁵⁶ and Þorfinnr could well have acquired some knowledge of Scottish administrative systems at the Scottish court. If this tradition of his childhood is genuine, he was almost certainly brought up a Christian, and although probably not literate himself, may well have had literate clerics in his following throughout his reign. This is significant, since the development of assessment-systems in other areas appears to be linked to the presence of literate Christian administrators, and to the granting of land to the Church.¹⁵⁷ This is particularly important in the context of Þorfinnr's establishment of a permanent bishopric in Orkney (see below), but some form of literate administration may have taken place throughout Þorfinnr's reign.¹⁵⁸

Besides his Scottish connections, Þorfinnr had contacts with a number of other Christian rulers. His co-earl Rögnvaldr had served at the court of Jarosleiv in Novgorod as his *landvarnarmaðr*¹⁵⁹, while *Orkneyinga saga* also refers to either Þorfinnr himself, or his ally Kálfr Árnason, serving *fyrir þingamannaliði* in England.¹⁶⁰ While the text here is ambiguous (editorial punctuation can make the passage refer either to Þorfinnr or to Kálfr),¹⁶¹ to some extent the ambiguity is unimportant; whether Kálfr or Þorfinnr himself had experience of the English court there is a possibility of Anglo-Scandinavian influence at this time. Further Anglo-Scandinavian administrative links are possible through bishop Heinricus.¹⁶² Finally, Þorfinnr is said to have journeyed to Rome (probably c. 1050), visiting *en route* the rulers of Norway, Denmark, and Germany, and establishing a bishopric at Birsay on his return. At this point he is said to have settled down to government and lawmaking.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁶ Williams, *The dabhach reconsidered*, *passim*.

¹⁵⁷ Williams, *Land Assessment*, pp. 29-31, 216-8.

¹⁵⁸ Adam of Bremen appears to confirm *Orkneyinga saga*'s account of the establishment of the bishopric at Birsay (*OS*, ch. 31, pp. 80-1; *Adami Bremensis, Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum* (III, 27; IV, 35) in *Quellen des 9. und 11. Jahrhunderts zur Geschichte der Hamburgischen Kirche und des Reiches*, ed. by W. Trillmich and R. Buchner (Darmstadt, 1978); Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, pp. 80-1), but he also refers to earlier English and Scottish bishops in the Orkneys, especially one Heinricus who had earlier been the treasurer of Cnut the Great in England, and later became bishop of Lund (*Adam* IV, 8, 35). Heinricus seems from this list of positions to fit the model of a clerical administrator very well, in addition to providing a possible vehicle for administrative concepts from England.

¹⁵⁹ *OS*, ch. 21, pp. 53-4. 'Land-defence man'.

¹⁶⁰ *OS*, ch. 31, p. 79. 'In charge of the royal household troops'.

¹⁶¹ J. Jesch, 'England and *Orkneyinga saga*', in *The Viking Age in Caithness, Orkney and the North Atlantic*, ed. C.E. Batey *et al.* (Edinburgh, 1993), pp. 222-39 (pp. 223-4, 230-2).

¹⁶² See note 157.

¹⁶³ *OS*, ch. 31, p. 80. See also note 157 above.

All these potential influences were from areas under the authority of Christian rulers, and the establishment of the Church on Orkney may well be very important as regards Þorfinn's ability to govern and make laws. It also almost certainly involved granting land to the Church to support the new bishopric, and it is likely that, as elsewhere, the Church would seek to secure its landholdings by charters. While not absolutely necessary, a system of land valuation would have been useful in this context.

A further point of interest for the development of assessment based on ounces and pennies is that the practice of silver hoarding appears to have stopped around this time (see Fig. 2: *Deposition*, above), just when Þorfinn was broadening Orkney's international contacts, and in a period when both Denmark and Norway were beginning to develop their own national coinage. Links with the archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen also gave connections to the more established monetary economy of Germany. This is particularly important as a possible key to the introduction of the pennyland assessment. As mentioned above, there were eighteen pennylands to the ounceland within the earldom of Orkney. While a ratio of 18 pennies to the ounce cannot be traced in this period either in England or Scandinavia, this corresponds to the relationship between the ounce and the silver penny of Cologne. From c. 1050–c. 1150 Cologne, like England, maintained a mark of 216 gm. However, unlike England, this mark was divided into 144 pennies of c. 1.5 gm each.¹⁶⁴

1 mark = 216 gm = 7 ounces @ 27 gm = 144 pennies @ 1.5 gm

1 ounce = 27 gm = 3 *ertugar* @ 9 gm = 18 pennies @ 1.5 gm

1 *ertog* = 9 gm = 6 pennies @ 1.5 gm

According to P. Nightingale this weight standard was adopted by Cologne as a result of Anglo-Danish trading links, but according to P. Grierson it is possible that the coinage reforms of Edward the Confessor c. 1050 may have been an attempt to equal the weight of the Cologne penny.¹⁶⁵ Both agree that the Cologne mark and penny were unusually stable in the late eleventh century and onwards. According to Grierson, 'The coins of the archbishops of Cologne, in contrast to those of most of their neighbours, scarcely declined in weight at all, and were considered the best in Ger-

¹⁶⁴ W. Hävernick, 'Der Kölner Pfennig im 12 und 13 Jahrhundert, Periode der territorialen Pfennigmünze', *Beheft 18, zur Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Stuttgart, 1930), pp. 43–9; *ibid.*, *Die Münzen von Köln*, I (Cologne, 1935), p. 7; Nightingale, *Ora, Mark and Mancus*, I, p. 252; *ibid.*, *Weight-Standards*, pp. 200–1.

¹⁶⁵ Nightingale, *Weight-Standards*, p. 200; P. Grierson, *The Coins of Medieval Europe* (London, 1991), p. 72.

many',¹⁶⁶ while Nightingale argues that following developments in currency in the mid-twelfth century, monetary ties were lost between England and Scandinavia, while 'Scandinavia's only remaining monetary ties with northern Europe were with the Rhineland, where the Cologne denier was still struck to the mark of 216g (*i.e.* 144 x 1.5g) until the thirteenth century.'¹⁶⁷

It was earlier noted that two pennies from Cologne are found in hoards from Norse Scotland from *c.* 970 and *c.* 1000. Given that the Cologne standard was compatible with the division of the ounce into thirds and sixths, and accepting the continued trade-links between the Rhineland and Scandinavia and the prominence of the Cologne coinage, the weight standard of Cologne from *c.* 1050 seems a plausible origin for a relationship of 18 pennies to the ounce in Norse Scotland.¹⁶⁸ Such a possibility is re-inforced by the saga account of Earl Þorfinn's expedition to Rome, *c.* 1050. Þorfinnr travelled between Denmark and Rome through Germany, and the standard route at this time would have been through Cologne.¹⁶⁹ It was following this trip that Þorfinnr is said to have settled down to the business of law-making and government.¹⁷⁰ Continued links with Germany are indicated by the connection between Þorfinn's newly established bishopric at Birsay, and the archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen.¹⁷¹

Such links with the German church may well provide the key to the introduction of the land-assessment system in Orkney. The role of the Church as a provider of literate administrators has already been discussed, as have (briefly) the links between grants of land to the Church and the development of land charters and land-assessment systems in the broader European context. Furthermore, the archbishops of both Cologne and Hamburg-Bremen were of great political importance during the later years of Þorfinnr's reign. The power of Cologne was built up under Archbishop Hermann II (1036-

¹⁶⁶ Grierson, *Coins of Medieval Europe*, p. 66. D.M. Metcalf further points to the importance of the Cologne penny at this period ('Continuity and Change in English Monetary History, *c.* 973–1086', pts. 1 & 2, *BNJ* 50 (1980), pp. 20–49; *BNJ* 51 (1981), pp. 52–90 (pp. 57–8)).

¹⁶⁷ Nightingale, *Weight-standards*, p. 207.

¹⁶⁸ Brian Smith (unpublished), cited in S. Imsen, *Norske Bondekommunalisme fra Magnus Lagabøte til Kristian Kvart, Del 2, Lydriketiden* (Trondheim, 1994), p. 259. I am grateful to Brian Smith for useful discussion on this point.

¹⁶⁹ H. Fuhrmann, *Germany in the High Middle Ages, c. 1050–1200* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 23–5.

¹⁷⁰ *OS*, ch. 31, pp. 80–1.

¹⁷¹ *Adam* III, 27; IV, 35; Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, pp. 80–1; B.E. Crawford, 'Birsay and the Early Earls and Bishops of Orkney', in *Birsay: A Centre of Political and Ecclesiastical Power*, Orkney Heritage 2 (1983), pp. 97–118 (pp. 101–5).

56) and continued to develop under his successor Anno (1056-75),¹⁷² and the fact that the Cologne penny (minted by the archbishops rather than the emperor) remained unusually stable during this period is probably testament to their political power. The peak of Anno's authority came during the minority of Henry IV (1056-65), first as leader of a faction in opposition to the Empress Agnes, then as regent, but he had already been a figure of importance at the court of Henry III.¹⁷³

Archbishop Adalbert of Hamburg-Bremen (1043-72) was also a powerful figure throughout this period; a longstanding ally of Henry III against the Saxon nobility, and like Anno of Cologne, later a regent to the young Henry IV.¹⁷⁴ Since the bishopric of Orkney fell under the jurisdiction of Hamburg-Bremen rather than Cologne, the influence of the former seems more likely for administrative structures in Orkney. However, since the Cologne penny was widely recognised as the dominant standard in much of Germany, the Cologne weight standard could have been adopted without any need for direct contact with Cologne itself, especially since Hamburg-Bremen lacked a coinage of similar influence.

Porfinnr's journey could have brought him into contact with all three of the archbishops mentioned; *Orkneyinga saga* tells us that he visited Henry III in Saxony,¹⁷⁵ and it is likely that he would have come into contact with both Archbishop Adalbert,¹⁷⁶ and with Anno, who before his appointment as Archbishop of Cologne in 1056 served as Chaplain and advisor to Henry.¹⁷⁷ From Saxony his route to Rome is likely to have followed the main North-South trade artery down the Rhine valley through Cologne, which according to Fuhrmann linked Italy not only with northern Germany but 'even with England and Scandinavia'.¹⁷⁸ A figure of Porfinnr's rank, especially on his way to Rome, is unlikely to have passed through Cologne without coming into contact with the Archbishop; at that point Hermann II. Porfinnr could well have established lasting contacts with any of them. The development of some form of political alliance with such dominant figures within the Ger-

¹⁷² R. Schieffer, 'Erzbischöfe und Bischofskirche von Köln', in *Die Salier und das Reich: Band 2, Die Reichskirche in der Salierzeit*, ed. by S. Weinfurter (Sigmaringen, 1992), pp. 1-29 (pp. 5-15).

¹⁷³ Fuhrmann, *Germany in the High Middle Ages*, p. 57; Schieffer, *Erzbischöfe und Bischofskirche*, pp. 9-11.

¹⁷⁴ Fuhrmann, *Germany in the High Middle Ages*, pp. 42, 57.

¹⁷⁵ *OS*, ch. 31, pp. 80-1

¹⁷⁶ Crawford, *Birsay and the Early Earls and Bishops*, p. 103.

¹⁷⁷ K. Jordan, *Investiturstreit und frühe Stauferzeit* (München, 1973), p. 22.

¹⁷⁸ Fuhrmann, *Germany in the High Middle Ages*, p. 23.

man Empire¹⁷⁹ is also a possibility, as a balance to the power of the kings of Norway, England and Denmark. Certainly, if Þorfinnr did adopt a new standard of ounces and pennies at this time, there might have been political motives for adopting the standard of a neutral episcopal mint rather than that of any of the neighbouring kingdoms.

Such an origin for the ounceland / pennyland relationship can only be speculative. Nevertheless, one should note in this context a reference in 1528 to '21 mark burnt, 12 Shetland shillings in every mark, in Shetland weight'.¹⁸⁰ While this is not an indication of minted Shetland currency,¹⁸¹ it does indicate the continued usage, throughout the later Middle Ages, of a locally recognised mark of silver, corresponding to 12 nominal shillings, or 144 nominal pennies; consistent both with the Cologne mark of the eleventh–thirteenth centuries, and with the ounceland / pennyland ratio in the Northern Isles. While weight standards had shifted in Cologne itself in the meanwhile, it is possible that the Cologne standard, once established in the Northern Isles, remained the local standard; hence the reference to 'Shetland weight'.

If this explanation of the origins of the 18 pennyland grouping in the north is correct, the problem of the differing ratios of ouncelands and pennylands in the north and west is removed. The greatest density of pennyland units in western Scotland, unlike that of the ounceland or *dabhach*, corresponds with the extent of the early kingdom of Dál Riata. Continuity of the Dalriadic 20-house unit would explain the grouping of the western pennylands in twenties without reference to metrology.

It is also important to bear in mind that, as discussed earlier, there does not seem to have been a very precise degree of metrological accuracy during this period. The relationships between ounces and pennies described above represent ideals, rather than a standard to which all coins were minted exactly. Many of the arm-rings on which estimates of the ounce have been based vary from their supposed targets by a margin of at least a penny or two. Furthermore, if the pennyland assessment was extended to western Scotland by a ruler familiar with the 1:18 standard of Orkney, then a ratio of 1:20 worked to that ruler's advantage. Assuming that the same nominal penny was used in both areas, the ruler would receive an extra two pennies to the nominal ounce. One should also consider that tribute was probably

¹⁷⁹ During the minority of Henry IV, both Anno and Adalbert exercised considerable political authority. Fuhrmann, *Germany in the High Middle Ages*, p. 57; Jordan, *Investiturstreit und frühe Stauferzeit*, pp. 22–4.

¹⁸⁰ *Orkney and Shetland Records*, I, ed. by A. W. & A. Johnston (London, 1907–13), no. 4; Thomson, *Ouncelands and Pennylands*, pp. 27–8.

¹⁸¹ Thomson, *Ouncelands and Pennylands*, pp. 27–8.

not paid exclusively in silver at this period, but also in produce of equivalent value to the amount of silver assessed. This indicates a shift towards a monetary economy: whether or not coins were in common circulation, the recognition of 'penny' value as well as 'penny' weight indicates a degree of economic awareness. Unfortunately, no evidence survives of valuation in Norse Scotland during this period. One must, however, accept that any ruler with the understanding to introduce an assessment system based on the relationship of 18 pennies to the ounce in Orkney would also have understood the advantage of receiving 20 pennies (worth) of tribute instead of 18.

To conclude, there is insufficient evidence to permit a definitive statement of when ouncelands and pennylands were introduced, or by whom, or even whether they were originally a single assessment system or two. However, it is possible to frame a model which fits the historical, archaeological and numismatic evidence better than previous theories on the subject. In the pre-Norse period, land assessment systems already existed in the kingdom of Dál Riata and on the Isle of Man. In common with much of Britain and Ireland, these systems were based on 'house' units grouped into larger multiples for the purpose of assessment. A similar system may well have existed in the Northern Isles and Caithness, but no evidence survives either for or against this. When the Norse settled in Scotland, there was sufficient continuity of population to permit the survival of existing estates, even though in many (or even most) cases they passed into Norse hands.

Archaeological evidence suggests a silver economy in Norse Scotland based on bullion rather than coinage, and furthermore suggests the existence of measurement of silver in ounces from the ninth century onwards. However, while coins clearly circulated, the wide variety of coinage discovered, coupled with the small quantities found, suggests that no standard 'penny' was yet in existence. At the beginning of the tenth century the earldom of Orkney was established. The tenth century also saw a shift from bottom-up groupings of 'house' estates to top-down systems of assessment, in which large units were subdivided to pay a fixed share of tribute / taxation. At any point in the tenth century, it is possible that the ounceland system may have been introduced within the earldom of Orkney. However, in the late tenth to early eleventh century, Earl Sigurðr Hlöðvisson extended Orcadian authority over the majority of the Norse settlements in Scotland and the Isle of Man, and it is likely that the ounceland assessment was extended at the same time, since Sigurðr is recorded as taking tribute in silver from his dominions.

In the mid-eleventh century, Sigurðr's son Þorfinnr also exercised authority across large areas of Norse Scotland. Þorfinnr's international connections and particularly his promotion of the Church on Orkney would have facilitated administrative developments, while his reign coincides both with the monetisation of Scandinavia and with the establishment in Cologne of a major international coinage to a weight-standard consistent with the ounce-land / pennyland relationship in Orkney. It thus seems likely that Þorfinnr introduced the pennyland assessment throughout his dominions as a refinement of the ounce-land system, superimposing it onto existing land divisions in the west. According to this model, ounce-lands and pennylands represent distinct, but related systems of land assessment, and their function was the raising of tribute / taxation, with no connection with the Norwegian *leiðangr* system.

EARLDOM STRATEGIES IN NORTH SCOTLAND AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PLACE-NAMES

Barbara E. Crawford

The earldom of Orkney came into being some time in the second half of the ninth century, and lasted until the last Sinclair earl yielded up all his earldom rights within Orkney to James III, as part of the process by which the kings of Scots acquired control of the Northern Isles in the years 1468-70.¹ Moreover, for most of that period it was a conjoint political unit with the earldom of Caithness, the northernmost territory of the mainland of Scotland. This is not a unique political phenomenon—two halves of a lordship ruled by one family and separated by a waterway—but it became increasingly anomalous as the Middle Ages progressed. The fact that the earls owed homage to two different royal sovereigns for their two earldoms is however exceedingly unusual, and on several occasions during the life of the earldoms it landed the earls in very difficult political situations.²

Going back to the early centuries of the existence of the earldom of Orkney-Caithness, when the earls were at the height of their power and independence, and when they dominated a maritime 'empire' in the Norse world of the North Sea – Atlantic zone, it is of interest to try and understand how they controlled their conjoint political unit, to see how they managed and organised their power structures. *Orkneyinga saga*, an account of the deeds of the earls of Orkney written in Iceland c. 1200, is a remarkable source of stories about their conquests and battles for control of the north mainland of Scotland, and beyond, although it says little about how they dominated the island groups of Orkney and Shetland. We have only the traditions as recorded in the saga and the *Historia Norvegiae* that the family of Rögnvaldr of Møre was active in winning control, probably on its own account, although the saga records the occasion as being sanctioned by King Haraldr Finehair (the first king of Norway to rule both southern and western Norway). He is also said in the standard saga account to have conquered Shetland, Orkney and the Hebrides on one of his expeditions to the British Isles,

¹ B.E. Crawford, 'The pawning of Orkney and Shetland: a reconsideration of the events of 1460-9', *Scot. Hist. Rev.*, xlviii (1969), pp. 35-53.

² *Idem*, 'The earldom of Caithness and the kingdom of Scotland, 1150-266', in *Essays on the Nobility of Medieval Scotland*, ed. K. Stringer (Edinburgh, 1985), pp. 25-43 (pp. 37-8).

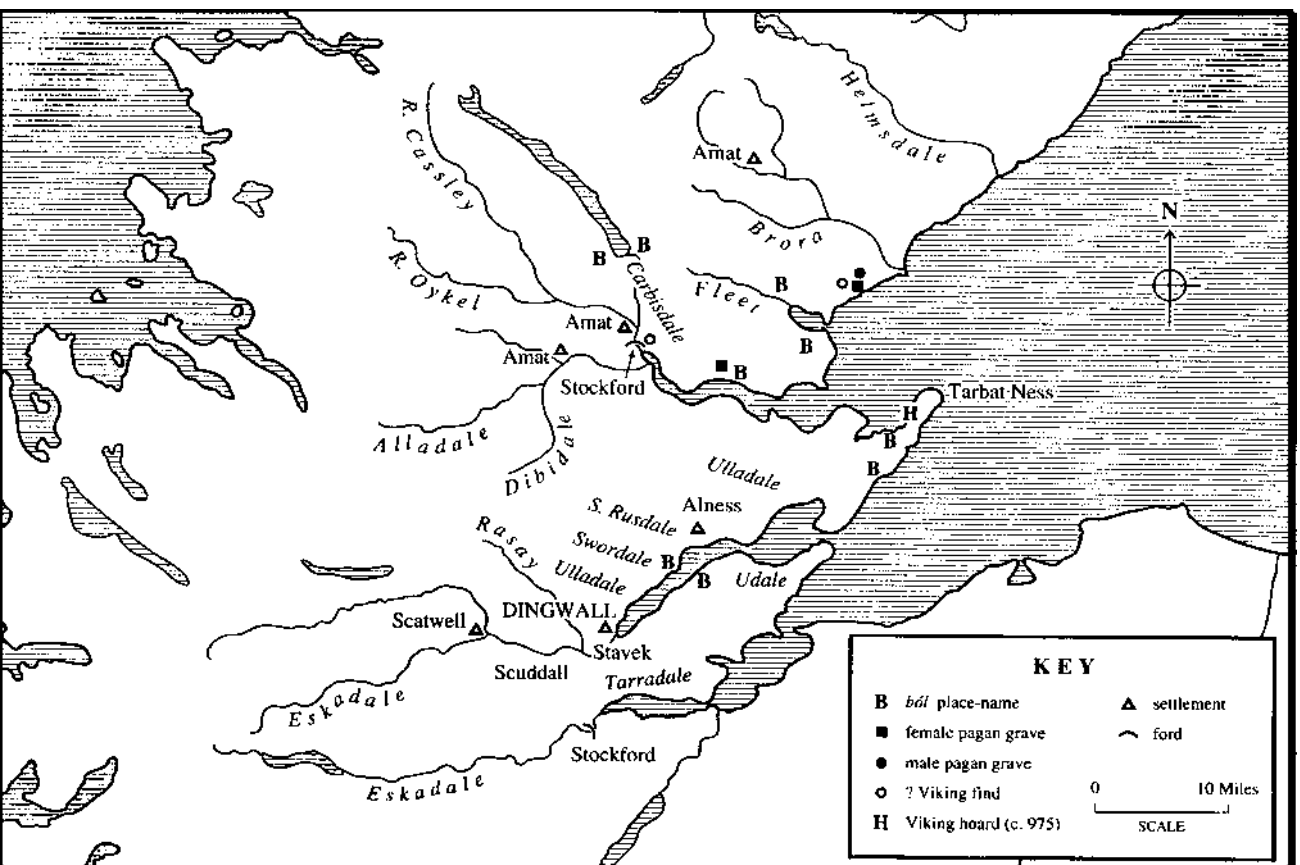
during which the son of Rögnvaldr of Møre, Ívarr, was killed, so that Haraldr 'gave Earl Rögnvaldr Shetland and Orkney in compensation for his son'.³ Rögnvaldr then gave all the islands to his brother Sigurðr, who had been the forecandleman on King Haraldr's ship, and Sigurðr was given the title of earl by King Haraldr before he sailed back to Norway. Thus was the earldom of Orkney born, in saga theory at least, and the date is likely to have been some time before 870—the date given by twelfth-century Icelandic historians for the settlement of Iceland, at which time Sigurðr I is said by them to have been earl of Orkney.⁴

It would be normal to expect this newly-established earl to use his position in the islands to expand across the Pentland Firth onto the north mainland of Scotland, which indeed the saga records as being Sigurðr's main theatre of activity. This process of expansion was not haphazard: we are told of a sustained programme of conquest conducted jointly with another famous Viking warrior, Þorsteinn the Red, and the saga tells briefly how together they conquered 'the whole of Caithness and a large part of Argyll, Moray and Ross'.⁵ This was achieved against formidable opposition and the name of their Scottish opponent is remembered as Maelbrigte, 'earl' of the Scots. He must have been a member of the ruling dynasty of the kingdom of Moray, whose power base was probably near Inverness and who controlled the rich grainlands of Moray and Easter Ross. It is clear from the saga account that these Scottish 'mormaers' (or 'kings' as they were sometimes called in the Irish sources) claimed rights over all the Scotto-Pictish provinces of the north mainland of Scotland, and the earls of Orkney had continually to struggle to maintain any conquests that they achieved in this area against the opposition of the Moray dynasty. The tenor of information in these early chapters of the saga (which includes the famous story of Sigurðr's death by blood-poisoning from a scratch caused by the tooth sticking out of Maelbrigte's head which Sigurðr was carrying home in triumph on his saddle-bow) is clearly based on strong traditions about the Scottish leaders and the formidable opposition they presented to the earls who were determined to win control of Caithness. It is interesting—and may be significant—that there is absolutely no tradition surviving of any similar powerful opponents among the native population in the Northern Isles, or the names of any leaders.

³ *Orkneyinga Saga* (OS), trans. H. Palsson and P. Edwards (Harmondsworth, 1978), ch. 4.

⁴ B.E. Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, Scotland in the Early Middle Ages, 2 (Leicester, 1987), pp. 53–6.

⁵ OS, ch. 5.



Earldom Strategies Fig. 1: Easter Ross, showing cited Norse place-names

The well-recorded tradition that Earl Sigurðr I was buried in a mound on the Oyckell banks⁶ surely indicates that Norse control of territory in the north Scottish mainland extended as far as that river at the time of his death (c. 892).⁷ Predatory warfare would be followed by a phase of consolidation of territory and settlement of conquered lands by Norse-speaking warriors and farmers. Such settlement would only be possible under the protection of powerful warlords, and we should see the process as taking place in a controlled way, rather than as a series of individual land-taking operations. The earls would naturally keep the best farms for their own use and consumption of produce, and they would hand out the rest to close followers and family. The only means by which this process might be traced at all is by looking at place-names of Old Norse origin which are found in varying proportions all over the north mainland of Scotland.⁸

Place-Names and Norse Settlement

The place-names of Orkney and Shetland have received close attention from Norse philologists, historians and geographers, and reveal a pattern of naming almost totally derived from the Old Norse language.⁹ There have been some useful studies of Caithness farm-names¹⁰, where influence from Gaelic becomes increasingly important south and west of the north-east tip of the Scottish mainland. Scandinavian place-names of a habitative kind

⁶ OS, ch. 5; *Heimskringla* (Hms), *The Sagas of the Norse Kings*, trans. S. Laing, revised P. Foote (1961), Harald Fairhair's Saga, ch. 22.

⁷ Barbara E. Crawford and Simon Taylor, 'The Southern Frontier of Norse Settlement in North Scotland. Place-Names and History', *Northern Scotland* (The Journal of the Centre for Scottish Studies, University of Aberdeen) vol.23 (2003), 1–76. This is an in-depth study of the place-names of Strath Glass and the Beaully River in Easter Ross, which makes an assessment of the Norse place-names which have survived in the area and what they can tell us about the nature of Norse settlement in a valley west of Inverness.

⁸ see Fig. 25 in Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, and Fig. 3 in Barbara E. Crawford, ed., *Scandinavian Settlement in Northern Britain* (Leicester, 1995).

⁹ H. Marwick, *Orkney Farm Names* (Kirkwall, 1952); W.P.T. Thomson, *History of Orkney* (Edinburgh, 1987); Crawford, ed., *Scandinavian Settlement*.

¹⁰ W.F.H. Nicolaisen, 'Scandinavians and Celts in Caithness. The place-name evidence', in *Caithness A Cultural Crossroads*, ed. J.R. Baldwin (Edinburgh, 1982), pp. 75–85; D. Waugh, 'The Scandinavian element *staðir* in Caithness, Orkney and Shetland', *Nomina* (1987), pp. 11, 61–74; *Idem*, 'Caithness. An Onomastic Frontier-Zone', in *The Viking Age in Caithness, Orkney and the North Atlantic*, eds. C.E. Batey, J. Jesch and C.D. Morris (Edinburgh, 1993), pp. 120–8.

throughout Scotland have also been studied¹¹ as evidence for the extent of Norse settlement, and Nicolaisen's attempt to build a chronology based on the different names and the pattern of their distribution has opened up a vigorous debate about the usefulness of this method and the conclusions based on it.¹² But a chronology based on the progress of earldom conquest and settlement has not yet been attempted and it is a line of research which could bring up some interesting ideas about the phases of settlement reflecting action by the earls on the north mainland. Certainly the Norse place-names of Caithness, Sutherland, Ross (and indeed the west mainland of Scotland) are worthy of study with this object in view.

Where collection of such names has been done, as in W.J. Watson's *Place-Names of Ross and Cromarty*,¹³ there is a basis on which to build up a picture of the extent of Norse settlement: and recent studies of Easter and Wester Ross¹⁴ have shown that we are only scratching the surface as far as our understanding of Norse settlement is concerned in an environment where the toponymic picture superficially appears almost totally Gaelic. The problem in much of the north and west mainland is that the Norse names have sometimes been adapted phonologically into Gaelic and become difficult to recognise. Many have also been lost and replaced by Gaelic names over the centuries, so that it is often luck if an original Norse name has survived in some ancient map or early historical source.

As far as chronology goes it is also now recognised that it is very difficult indeed to date the different Norse settlement-name elements. When did expansion onto the north mainland start? It is fairly clear that permanent farm-nomenclature would only be established in the phase of consolidation and settlement after Sigurðr's conquests in the late ninth century. Some land-taking would have occurred throughout Caithness and Sutherland before Sigurðr's death and burial by the banks of the Oykel. This river was known to the Icelandic writers to have been an important frontier as far as

¹¹ W.F.H. Nicolaisen, 'Norse settlement in the Northern and Western Isles—some place-name evidence', *SHR* xlviii (1969), pp. 6–17.

¹² Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*; W.F.H. Nicolaisen, 'Place-name maps—How reliable are they?', in *Studia Onomastica. Festschrift till Thorsten Andersson*, eds L. Peterson and S. Strandberg (1989), pp. 262–8; R. Cox, 'The Origin and Relative Chronology of *Shader*-names in the Hebrides', *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 16 (1991), pp. 95–113; Crawford, ed., *Scandinavian Settlement in Northern Britain*, pp. 9–12.

¹³ W.J. Watson, *Place-Names of Ross and Cromarty* (1904, reprinted Evanton, 1996).

¹⁴ B.E. Crawford, *Earl and Mormaer. Norse-Pictish Relationships in North Scotland* (Groam House lectures no. 4, Rosemarkie, 1995); I. Fraser, 'Norse Settlement on the North-west Seaboard', in Crawford, ed., *Scandinavian Settlement*, pp. 92–107.

Norse settlement was concerned.¹⁵ But control was not permanent from that time. The saga says quite definitely that a period of weak rule followed Sigurðr's death, and that when Hallaðr was sent west by his father Rögnvaldr of Møre, and was also given the title of earl by Haraldr Finehair, he was unable to control bands of marauding Vikings who raided the islands as well as Caithness, so that the farmers complained of their losses.¹⁶ Here is some indication that Norse farmers were already settled in Caithness, and were needing a strong earl to protect them from looters and killers, in this instance of Norse origin (and possibly of Danish origin too from the story which follows in the saga about two Danish Vikings in the islands). After this the thrall-born son of Earl Rögnvaldr was given the earldom by his father, who was glad to get rid of him. Torf-Einarr proved to be a powerful and successful warrior however, and his authority evidently spread as far as Tarbatness in Easter Ross from the confused tradition that he acquired his name from being 'the first man to dig peat for fuel, firewood being very scarce on the islands,' at 'Torfness in Scotland'.¹⁷ (This 'ness' is considered to be what is today called Tarbatness, the most prominent headland in Easter Ross).¹⁸ There is no other indication of any campaigns during the period of Torf-Einarr's rule, or that of his sons, although his grandsons Ljótr and Skúli (mid-tenth century) were pressed hard by the earls of Moray in Caithness itself. It is unlikely that Norse influence would have survived in Ross, or indeed Sutherland, during this period of weak earldom rule. Not until the end of the tenth century and the reign of Sigurðr II 'the Stout' did a powerful earl again lead campaigns south and dominate Ross. It is very probably from this period that the colonisation of the coastal plains, evidenced by the farm names which end in ON *-ból* and *-bó* (see Fig. 1), took place.

¹⁵ As is well known, the southern portion of Caithness known as Sutherland (ON *suðr-land* = 'the south land') is named from a northern perspective. What has never been clarified is why and when this name was applied, and what it meant in terms of earldom-organisation.

¹⁶ OS, ch. 5.

¹⁷ OS, ch. 7.

¹⁸ Although this piece of folk-etymology cannot be used safely to indicate anything about Torf-Einarr or his name, it is interesting to note that the scarcity of wood in Orkney is linked by the saga-writer with the earl's extraction of fuel from a headland in Easter Ross. I have argued recently (in *Earl and Mormaer*) that the earls' campaigns in Easter Ross were specifically aimed to control the fine timber resources of the area, not for fuel, but for ship-building purposes.

Ross: outside the earldom but an important component in earldom strategy

Archaeological evidence such as Norse pagan graves is sparse south of north-eastern Caithness. The few graves from south-east Sutherland certainly indicate settlement by pagan Norsemen, before the second half of the tenth century. The absence of any Norse grave-finds south of the Oyckell can be seen as indicating that permanent settlement in Easter Ross was not achieved in the pagan period, which would further support the argument that we can look to the reign of the converted Earl Sigurðr II as the time when his followers named the *-ból* / *-bó* farms. However we have the strongly-established tradition, repeated in Norse sources, that the Oyckell was always the southern frontier of the Caithness earldom, and there is never any reference to Ross being granted to the earls, or of it being part of their earldom-possession. This does suggest that Ross was not brought into the earldom administrative system.¹⁹ Nonetheless, *Orkneyinga saga* provides plenty of evidence that the province was dominated by Earl Sigurðr II and his son Þorfinnr in the late tenth and first half of the eleventh centuries, and that they fought hard with the rulers of Moray to achieve that domination. Why did they?

In the first place there was the imperative need for timber, which I have suggested may help to explain the earls' determination to control the wooded valleys of the rivers Conon, Beaul, Carron, and Oyckell, which are such an attractive feature of Easter Ross: this would be primarily for the purpose of controlling an accessible supply of pine, ash and oak for the maintenance and repair of the earldom fleet of longships.²⁰ What will be focussed on more closely here are the strategic requirements of these earls, who needed to control the river valleys giving access to the interior, for transport of their armies across from east to west. We should not forget that Earl Sigurðr II was killed in battle in Ireland; he and his son Þorfinnr had sufficient power in the Hebrides (if not Man) to give them aspirations to control parts of Ireland, and there was more than one way to reach the Irish Sea from Orkney. Rather than sailing round the stormy waterways of north-west Scotland and through the Minch, the earls may sometimes have pre-

¹⁹ The absence of the Norse land-divisions of ouncelands and pennylands in Ross also indicates that the earls did not impose their administrative and fiscal arrangements in this area: see Barbara E. Crawford, 'The Making of a Frontier: the Firthlands from the Ninth to Twelfth Centuries' in *Firthlands of Ross and Sutherland*, ed. J.R. Baldwin (Edinburgh, 1986), pp. 33–46 (p. 43).

²⁰ Crawford, *Earl and Mormaer*, pp. 15–16.

ferred to cross the central mountainous massif on horseback in order to reach the sheltered waters of the sea lochs of Wester Ross, where ships would await them. This could be achieved by sailing down the east coast of Caithness and Sutherland and up the rivers Fleet, Oyckell, Carron and Conon as far as they were navigable, then crossing the headwaters of the river systems to the sea lochs of the west.²¹

The existence today of Norse settlement names up the river valleys running into the mountainous, and well-wooded, interior of Ross suggests that control was *not* limited to the coast. There would appear to have been penetration of the inland valleys, as said, for strategic and economic purposes. Looked at in a geo-political light, the Firthlands of Easter Ross, (Dornoch Firth, Cromarty Firth, Beaully Firth) formed an important 'nexus' for control of the whole of north Scotland. To dominate the waterways alone was not enough; the earls' political aspirations to control the Hebrides from the secure base of their northern earldoms meant that they had to have access to the central mountainous terrain and had to be able to cross from coast to coast easily and safely. When the valuable timber resources of the Firths and the upper reaches of these well-wooded river valleys are also taken into account it becomes obvious that domination of the whole province of Ross would have been an important political and economic consideration for the more ambitious of the earls to aspire to.

Norse place-names in Ross

The remaining vital source of information to help us develop some understanding of earldom strategies (hinted at in the sparse record in *Orkneyinga saga*) is the body of Norse place-names which does survive among the predominantly Gaelic nomenclature of the region. Their survival, even in small numbers, gives an indication of the influence once exercised by Norse colonisers later absorbed into a Gaelic-speaking world. To have survived at all in such circumstances suggests that these names were originally given by settlers who had the protection of the earldom-system and who were part of that organisation. They must have been tied to the earl in some way as his followers and fulfilling a role which enabled the earls to function as warlords or as exploiters of the economic potential of the region. These frontiersmen would be a minority among a Gaelic population, but their political

²¹ I have argued elsewhere that the earls may also have crossed from the Moray Firth to Argyll through the Great Glen when political conditions made it possible: Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, pp. 22–4.

and social structures would have been—albeit temporarily—dominant: so long as they had the assured protection of the powerful earl based some distance to the north, but exceedingly mobile. The most convincing and remarkable example of a place-name which proves all of these points is, as we shall see, that of Dingwall, the nub of Easter Ross today, located at the head of the Cromarty Firth.

The survival of place-names with the Old Norse element *þing* (= ‘public assembly’) in all areas of the British Isles which had come under the influence of Norse or Danish settlers, is one of the most fascinating pointers to the social and legal inheritance left behind by these settlers.²² *Þing*-names combined with the ON element *völlr* (= ‘field, open space where the assembly met’), usually anglicised to ‘wall’ or ‘well’, are quintessentially western Scandinavian in distribution, emanating from Norwegian settlement. The name Dingwall therefore provides incontrovertible evidence of a flourishing Scandinavian community in the Firthlands of Easter Ross, dominant enough in the locality to organise its own legal assembly for the running of social and economic matters according to Norse law and custom.²³ The location of Dingwall is moreover a very significant pointer to the geographical spread of Norse colonists for it must have been chosen for its centrality to an area of Norse influence. This means not only for the farmers of the *ból*-estates on the coastal peninsulas and shores of the Firths, but also for those settlers up the river-valleys, whose presence is attested by ‘dale’ (*-dalr*), ‘well’ (*-völlr*), and ‘side’ (*-setr*) names—not conventionally considered to be evidence of actual farming settlements. Dingwall is in fact central to a whole river system, as can be seen from the map (Fig. 1).²⁴

In a preliminary discussion of the significance of Dingwall in the pattern of Norse settlement in Easter Ross I expressed some hesitation about linking such a significant *þing* name with the earls of Orkney, who otherwise do not seem to have been strong supporters of these legal assemblies in their earldoms.²⁵ They were essentially popular assemblies in the Norse world and places where strong-minded farmers could impose conditions on their rulers (as seen from events in Orkney in the reign of Earl Einarr in the early eleventh century).²⁶ Moreover, as noted already, Ross did not become part of earldom territory, although the earls expended much warlike effort on establishing their power in the region. It seems very likely therefore that the set-

²² G. Fellows-Jensen, ‘Tingwall: the significance of the name’, *Shetland's Northern Links. Language and History*, ed. D. Waugh (1996), pp. 16–29.

²³ Crawford, *Earl and Mormaer*, p. 19.

²⁴ Crawford, *Earl and Mormaer*, p. 18.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²⁶ *OS*, ch. 14.

tlers brought into this territory, as farmers on the coastal grainlands, or as timber operators in the valleys, may have been allowed a degree of freedom from earldom control very different from Orkney or Caithness. The Norse settlers in Ross may have been more or less self-governing, although no doubt obliged to provide some renders and services for the earls. When asking where these settlers might have come from there are good grounds for pointing to the home country of Norway rather than the treeless earldoms in the north.

Information about Earl Þorfinnr in the saga tells us of his links with members of his wife's family, one of whom, Kálfr Árnason, sought refuge with Þorfinnr from King Magnús in Norway, and established himself with a 'large following' in Orkney. He was 'very close' to the earl and helped him win the battle of Robery against Rögnvaldr Brusason. After that Kálfr is said to have been sent by Þorfinnr to the Hebrides 'to make sure of his authority there'.²⁷ Although there is no specific mention of Ross being included in the area where Kálfr acted as the earl's troubleshooter, we can see from this information how the frontier parts of Þorfinnr's empire were governed. It also demonstrates the close links which the earl had with his wife's relatives in Norway, who could have provided the requisite manpower to settle areas where their expertise in timber-felling, or ship-building, would have been very usefully employed. Throughout north Scotland, and particularly in frontier areas such as Ross, the earl would certainly need reliable men established at strategic points for the protection of land and sea routes from Orkney / Caithness to the Hebrides, as well as for the exploitation of rich woodlands where they existed.²⁸ The passes across to the west from Sutherland and Easter Ross were vital arteries for the wider earldom network of control, and Dingwall was well-placed to form a control centre regulating access to the Conon valley and the route through to Loch Carron (as it has done in more recent centuries in this part of the Highlands). The earl's men, or Kálfr's men²⁹, settled in the valleys would have established Dingwall as their administrative centre. Here they could meet for regular assemblies, at which the organisation of the province would be determined and relationships with the native farmers regulated. This may provide the background situation to the important place which Dingwall had in the

²⁷ *OS*, ch. 27.

²⁸ Crawford, *Earl and Mormaer*, n. 10.

²⁹ Morkinskinna's account of Kálfr fleeing from King Magnús also mentions numbers of Þrendir (Trondheim farmers) leaving and going overseas 'as Kálfr did' (T.M. Anderson and K.A. Gade, eds., *Morkinskinna, The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings*, Islandica vol. LI (Ithaca and London, 2000), p. 104). That suggests that they also moved westwards to the Orkneys (or the earl's territories in north Scotland?)

marchlands south of earldom territory, and help to explain the apparent semi-autonomous status of the province of Ross, which probably continued for some while after the period of strong earldom rule from Orkney.

Wider pattern of Norse Place-Names

It may be possible to discern some overall pattern of economic organisation and territorial exploitation if all the Norse place-names are looked at in those areas on the frontiers of the main earldom possessions.³⁰ As mentioned already the *ból* / *bó* farm names of Easter Ross are located on the good cultivable lands of the coastal plains, and are quite well-known.³¹ They have formed part of an important linguistic study into the *ból* / *bólstaðr* pattern of names in north Scotland and the Isles,³² which has shown how complex these names are, suggesting that the different elements involved have to be studied as the result of various phases of Norse settlement, under varying social and perhaps political conditions. The *ból* / *-bó* names of Easter Ross and south-east Sutherland (which have been linked by Cox in his study of the distribution of these elements with Tiree, Coll and Mull, where the same element also occurs as a farm-name) can be seen as one group which are likely to have been the first permanent Norse holdings in the area, and—if my argument about earldom strategies has any validity—in earldom-ownership, at any rate initially. It is very tempting to see this generic as being of the same significance as the *bú* element in Orkney, used for the bordland estates of the earls and coming to signify in Orkney a ‘farm worked as a single unit, as opposed to a multi-occupancy township’.³³ An important category of name is those ending in ON *-dalr* (dale) which is very prominent in these frontier areas. This class of toponymic has been the subject of some discussion but is now more generously treated as proof of settlement and of Norse possession of the valley concerned. The dispute about the significance of *-dalr* names has been concerned with their evidence for permanent habitation.³⁴ It can be shown that most of the valleys

³⁰ It should be stressed here that this study of these names is only preliminary, and requires more intensive linguistic assessment of their earliest written forms, as well as of the pattern of names in the landscape.

³¹ But not apparently all recorded. A small croft on the bank of the Oykel, near Carbisdale, with the name Arnebol, does not appear to have made the lists of *ból* names.

³² R. Cox, ‘Descendants of Norse *Bólstaðr*? A re-examination of the lineage of *Bost* & co.’, in *Peoples and Settlement in North-West Ross*, ed. J.R. Baldwin (Edinburgh, 1994), pp. 43–67.

³³ Thomson, *History of Orkney*, p. 29.

³⁴ Nicolaisen, ‘Norse Settlement’, p. 16; Crawford, *Scandinavian Settlement*, p. 12.

running westwards from the waters of the Dornoch, Cromarty and Beauly Firths have had Norse names ending in 'dale', even although some may be half-forgotten and not much used today. Some of these names appear to reflect the species of tree which presumably at one time grew in the area, suggesting that their importance was connected with timber exploitation.³⁵ These names were given by Norse speakers and entered the permanent nomenclature of a Gaelic-speaking native population.

Because the usual habitative Norse names—such as *býr*, *staðr*, and *setr*—are absent from these river valleys, it has not been thought that Norse settlement was of permanent significance in them. Those Norse names which have been recognised were considered to be more or less incidental to the settlement pattern. However, it seems to be that instead of the usual habitative class other elements were used, the most typical generic in this area being *völlr* (= 'field'), a fairly common ending throughout Caithness and Sutherland also. There may be very few of these names in total, but where they are found they are in places of importance, if not of strategic importance. Such is Scatwell, where the Meig and Luichart rivers meet to form the Conon. This name has been discussed by me several times, and uncertain though its precise meaning may be, it is potentially rather significant that the only equivalent name in Norway, Scatval, is in Inner Trøndelag which Kálfr Árnason held from the earls of Lade.³⁶ The river valleys at the eastern end of the Trondheim fjord in Inner Trøndelag are well forested.

When looking at some other river confluences, it is also worth stressing that the Norse name for a confluence, *Amot* (*á-mót*, 'meeting of rivers'), is used three times, in the form *Amat*, along the river systems of Carron, Oyckell and Brora (see Fig. 1). These were not only terms for the confluence itself but were the names of farms, some of which became important estates. It is not a common name elsewhere in Norse Scotland—perhaps because there are very few large rivers in the northern or western isles—but it occurs as a settlement name at the confluences of large rivers in several locations in Norway.³⁷

³⁵ Crawford, *Earl and Mormaer*, pp. 24–5.

³⁶ Crawford, *Earl and Mormaer*, p. 24.

³⁷ *Norsk Stadnamn-leksikon (NSL)*, eds. J. Sandnes og O. Stemshaug (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 1990), s.v. *Amot*.

Langwell (ON lang-völlr) names

This compound name is also common in northern Scotland, in contrast to the Northern and Western Isles, so that one has to ask if it had any special significance? The literal translation of Langwell is 'long field' and it is found in at least ten locations in Sutherland and Ross (see Fig. 2), applied to stretches of cultivable land, perhaps hay fields (as most of the Langwell names seem to be in relatively low-lying locations, in river valleys).³⁸ At least one has become a large estate. What is signified by the stereotyping of such an apparently very ordinary name? It is hardly likely that the Norse settlers of north Scotland were so short of names for their settlements that they used this one for lack of anything better.³⁹

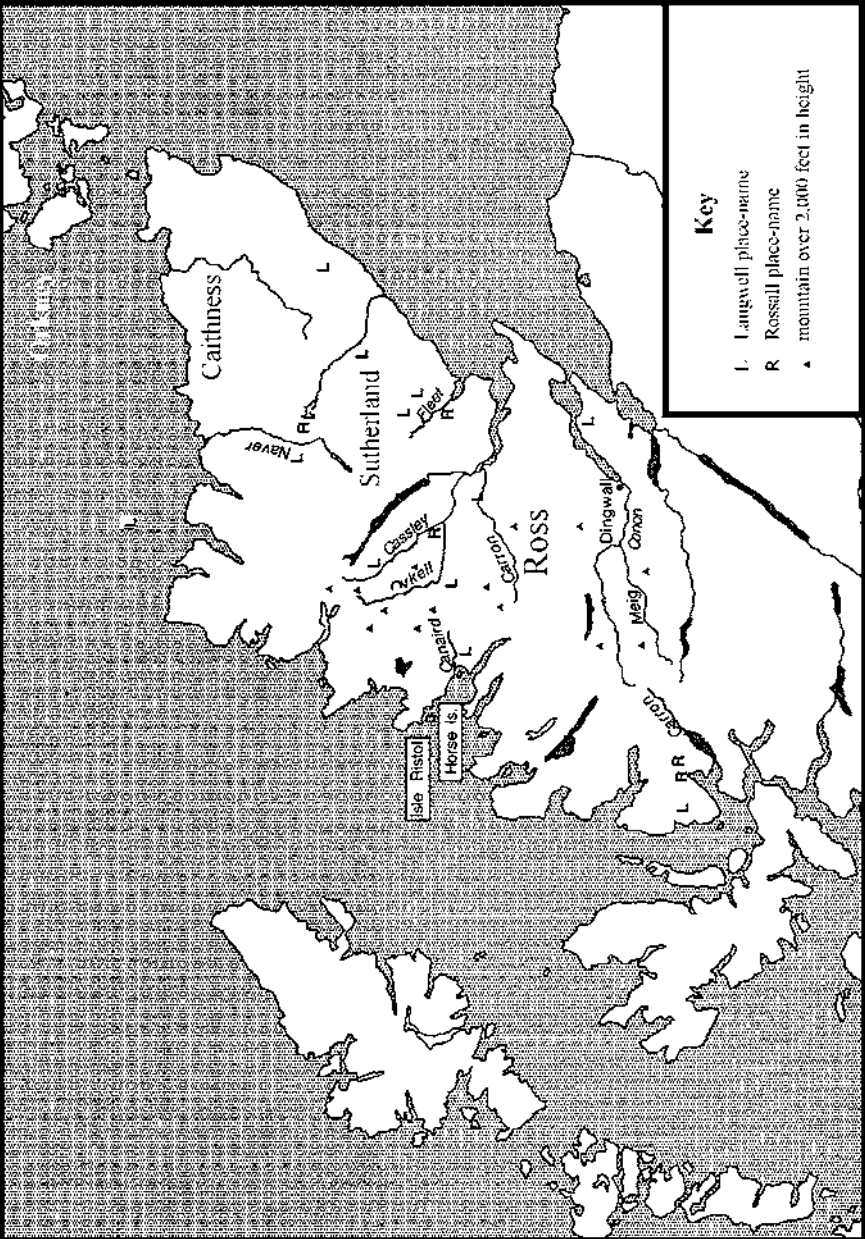
The specifics of all the *völlr* names are connected with farming activities, or describe the land, and do not contain personal names. They thus seem to point to some kind of Norse-controlled farming establishments in the river valleys (but perhaps not necessarily farmed by Norse speakers). There is an impression—particularly with the Langwell 'compound appellatives'—of an artificiality, as if these might be names imposed by an official land-owning class in a non-Norse environment. The cultural situation did not engender real habitative names, and the Norse naming process did not include many purely topographical names (although sometimes the Norse *völlr* name enters into the Gaelic toponymy, as for instance Craig Dal Langanal near Kildonan, and Ben Rosail in Glen Cassley). These stereotyped names may, perhaps, indicate tenanted farms, organised from the *ból* / *bó* estates on the coast, either for the earls' benefit, or for those members of his *hirð* entrusted with responsibilities in this frontier area. Such a model is well-known in other medieval societies, where coastal / estuarine farms had attached upland units producing complementary products.⁴⁰ In Easter Ross, the most valuable arable farms on the coastal plains could likewise have controlled the resources of the river valleys for the sea-faring earls and their followings. This would have included the available timber, and also perhaps

³⁸ Langanal on the R. Shiel in Moidart, and the same name in Bute, may also derived from ON *lang-völlr* (recent info. from Denis Rixson and not shown on Fig. 2).

³⁹ I have found only one Langwell in Orkney, on south-west Mainland, and none in Shetland.

⁴⁰ Some similar organisational basis was suggested by Bridget MacKenzie for the *ból* farms of Sutherland, and particularly Skibo, which she argues was 'the main headquarters for the Norse defence of the district', with dependent farms supplying men and supplies for the frontier in the time of Earl Sigurðr the Mighty (*The Vikings in East Sutherland*, privately produced by the Sutherland Tourist Board in 1985).

the produce from Langwell farms, hay, which may have been just as valuable, as pasture and a source of winter fodder for the herds of horses maintained for official use. These names need to be studied further within the context of the whole nomenclature in the different localities.



Earldom Strategies Fig. 2: Langwell and Rossall names in northern Scotland

Rossall (hross-völlr) names

Turning then to a second category of *völlr* names, Rossal (= 'horse-field'), we again appear to have another unusual stereotyping of a name which is not particularly common elsewhere in Norse Scotland.⁴¹ The four locations where the name occurs range from Strathnaver, Strathfleet, Glen Cassley to Loch Kishorn in Wester Ross (see Fig. 2) Again the name tells us little apart from the fact that these must have been suitable locations for the pasturing of horses, particularly mares.⁴² But looked at in the context of the organisation of earldom resources, and of the movement of earls and their followings around north Scotland, the name could be interpreted in a way that takes on a whole new significance.

Mobility by land was just as important as by sea in this block of territory, as has already been stressed. Apart from the movement across and through the mountains, on campaign, there was also the need for access when collecting taxes or organising other earldom resources. The earls and their followings needed horses, and they must have had a system organised which provided them with horses whenever and wherever they needed them. There are passing references in the saga to movement on horseback: Earl Skúli 'rode back north' after being in Scotland (meaning Moray in this context);⁴³ Moddan was sent back to Caithness by King Karl (from Moray) and rode 'deep inland';⁴⁴ Earl Rögnvaldr rode up Thursdale on his last fateful journey.⁴⁵

Three of the four places where Rossal names occur are north of the Oykell and therefore in earldom territory; the fourth is at Kishorn in Wester Ross, some distance to the south. The three in earldom territory are all inland from the coast, near important rivers:

1) Rosal in Strathnaver lies directly at the junction of two important land routes, one crossing the central mountainous terrain from the north coast to Sutherland and Ross, the other going south-east down to the coast of Caithness at Helmsdale.

2) Glen Rossall is near the confluence of the Rivers Cassley and Oykell, in fact at the head of tidal waters (which go far inland up the River Oykell from the Kyle of Sutherland). Several topographical names in the Glen in-

⁴¹ There are Rossall names in Lewis and Mull, but not apparently in the Northern Isles.

⁴² In Old Icelandic *hross* when gender-specific means 'stud-mare' (info. from Paul Bibire).

⁴³ *OS*, ch. 10.

⁴⁴ *OS*, ch. 20.

⁴⁵ *OS*, ch. 103.

corporate the Gaelicised element 'Rosail'. The River Oykell is a navigable artery providing an important through route to the west coast (the line taken by the A837 today).⁴⁶

3) Rossal in Strathfleet is on a steep slope above the river Fleet, near the important route (followed by the railway and the A839) which cuts up to Lairg, giving access to the south end of the mountain pass crossing to Loch Naver and thus to Rossal in Strathnaver.⁴⁷

Do these locations indicate that the place name Rossall might be specifically connected with horse breeding and corralling areas for the provision of horses for earldom warbands, or officials, changing from ship to horse for crossing the central parts of Sutherland? We cannot doubt that there must have been some system for the provision of horses, as in most state or imperial organisations which relied on speed of communications for the maintenance of power over blocks of territory inaccessible to ships. When the earls and their retinues set out from Orkney for campaigns southwards or westwards and chose not to sail the exposed sea-route round Cape Wrath, they could gain access to north Scotland by sailing direct to the Naver, Fleet, or Oykell (rivers providing the best possibilities for penetrating the interior of north Scotland by boat). They would then have to change to horses at some point, and the location of the Rossall names are well-placed as changing posts for the mountainous crossing to the west. If these names can be invested with the significance here suggested, it opens a very interesting insight into the possible organisation of an earldom transport system.

4) In the case of Loch Kishorn we are south of earldom territory, and on the west coast, but the location could also have significance for the important cross route from Wester Ross over to the River Conon and Dingwall, the political and administrative centre of Easter Ross (the route followed by the A832 today). In an area where Gaelic toponymy is overwhelmingly dominant there are two ON names, Russel and Rassal, close by each other, at the head of Loch Kishorn and further up the Kishorn River: both of which

⁴⁶ The estate of Rosehall, lying close to Glen Rossal, on the River Oykell, appears to have been named in the 18th century.

⁴⁷ It is interesting to note, as did Watson, that the glen between Strathnaver and Loch Shin is called Vagastie, which he derived from ON *vaka-staðr* ('watching-stead') (W.J. Watson, 'Some Sutherland names of places', *The Celtic Review* 2 (1905–6), p. 368). It seems more probable that the second element in Vagastie derives either from ON *steig* = 'a high, sticking-up feature', or from Old Icelandic *stigr* (= 'path, footway', associated with *stigi*, 'a steep ascent'). In Norway the name Steigen is known in many places (*NSL*, 297). The first element in Vagastie could derive from Old Icelandic *vagar* / *vagir* / *vögur*, 'carrying-frame for a horse to bear or drag' (cognate with *vagn*, English *waggon*) and the compound could mean 'path for pack-horses'. If so, it certainly points to this being a well-known route through the mountains of south Sutherland in Norse times.

are apparently derived from *hross*. They are recorded in the late sixteenth century as Ressor and Rassor / Rassoll. Watson suggests that the first derives from ON *hryssa-völlr* (= 'mare-field'), while the latter he assumes to be the same as Rossal.⁴⁸ The extraordinary coincidence of two such names in this location would seem to be explained by the underlying geology, for they are both on a strip of Durness limestone which outcrops at the head of Loch Kishorn.⁴⁹ Limestone pasture is noted for being good for the growth of strong bones in horses, and the close association of calciferous rock and two Norse farm names indicating horse pasturage here can hardly be coincidental. These names tell us that horse-rearing was a very important activity for Norse colonists where conditions were suitable, and suggest that this location could have been a horse-breeding centre for the Norse settlers of Wester Ross.⁵⁰

Looking further north along the coast of Wester Ross it is worth noting that the two names Isle Ristol and Horse Island are situated off the headland of Rubha Coigach and therefore convenient to the western end of the main route passing through the dramatic hills of Coigach to the Oykel watershed. Watson derives the former from *hryssa* (= 'mare') and *dalr* (= 'dale'), and suggests that the name originated on the mainland, and the island was named after it.⁵¹ The second name—and the stretch of water called Horse Sound—also indicate that the rearing of horses has been important in this locality (*Eilean nan Each* in Gaelic). These islands are part of the Summer Isles group, of which Tanera (ON *hafnar-øy* = 'harbour island') must clearly have been important to the Norse as an anchoring place. (Even the name 'Summer' may be a corruption of ON *sunna mærr* = 'southern border land', which, if so, would surely indicate the southern frontier of earldom territory). Horses and mares being reared and pastured in this locality would have provided a convenient mode of transport for earls and their retinues landing here from campaigns in the Hebrides and needing to pass across the

⁴⁸ Watson, *Place-Names of Ross and Cromarty*, p. 216.

⁴⁹ This geological situation also explains the location of the most northerly ash wood in Britain, now a Nature Reserve, at Rassal (D.N. MacVean, 'Woodland Scrub', in *The Vegetation of Scotland*, ed. J. Burnett (Edinburgh, 1964), p. 159), which lies on a steep slope on the south side of the Kishorn valley. Russal is located on the north side, on a narrow strip of limestone outcrop, where the Russall Burn flows into the head of the sea loch (and very near the site of the former oil-rig construction platform).

⁵⁰ The two 'Attadale' names near Kishorn, one in Applecross and the other on Loch Carron, give interesting evidence for the practice of horse-fighting in this location, for the name is supposed to indicate a level dale suitable for this sport, which was popular among the Norse (Watson, *Place-Names of Ross and Cromarty*, p. 195).

⁵¹ Watson, *Place-Names of Ross and Cromarty*, p. 260.

hills to Easter Ross. There is also a Langwell near Strath Canaird which lies directly on the route over to Oyckell Bridge.⁵²

Although the first recorded form of all these names is usually late, and rarely from the medieval period, there is one document which provides early evidence of the form of both Langwell and Rossal, and which also tells the historian that these were important estates, and not merely outlying fields. This is the 1269 charter of Archibald bishop of Moray granting 'all his land of Strathnaver' to Reginald le Cheyne and his wife, Marie, which is discussed by me elsewhere.⁵³ The lands in a block of territory in upper Strathnaver are listed, starting with 'Langeval et Rossewal'.⁵⁴ So, here is evidence that the Strathnaver Langwell (apparently present-day Langdale) and Rosal were important estates which had been granted to the Church of Moray in free alms some decades previously by Marie's mother, the Lady Joanna, but which were being granted back to Joanna's daughter and son-in-law by the bishop (rather an unusual occurrence). These individuals were the most important landowners in this part of north Scotland and these estates were clearly desirable and valuable to them. Why that was can only be guessed at, but their location at a strategic position in upper Strathnaver may partly explain why Reginald le Cheyne wanted to control them:— in order to maintain easy communications between his main estates at Duffus and his north Scottish possessions.

Conclusion

The first concluding point which should be made is that each of the Rossall and Langwell occurrences has to be studied within the local toponymy, both Norse and Gaelic. It is suggested that the use of these names throughout the area under discussion may have been due to the overall political organisation of the earldom of Orkney, which led to the standardised naming of farms as 'long-field' and 'horse-field'. Nonetheless each example has to be understood within its own geographical environment, and these vary mark-

⁵² This route is not followed by the road today and it will be necessary to explore the track which is shown on the OS 1-inch map as leading from Langwell in Strathcanaird across via Glen Acall and Glen Einig to Oyckell Bridge—and Langwell—and to the Easter Ross Carron and Braelangwell. The link between all these Langwell names at different ends of the passes across Rhidorroch may prove to be very significant for our understanding of the meaning of Langwell names.

⁵³ B.E. Crawford, 'Medieval Strathnaver' in *The Province of Strathnaver*, ed. J. Baldwin (Edinburgh, 2000).

⁵⁴ A.W. and A. Johnston, eds., *Caithness and Sutherland Recs.* (Viking Club, London, 1909), p. 33.

edly from Strathnaver, to east Sutherland, to Easter Ross and to Wester Ross, places miles apart and divided by difficult natural terrain. The environmental circumstances of the limestone outcrop at Kishorn for instance is a vital element in our interpretation as to why the Russel and Rassal names occur in that locality.⁵⁵

A second concluding point follows on from a developing interest in the province of Ross,⁵⁶ which this paper has taken a stage further. The place-names of Ross are a particularly important resource for providing some insight into Norse settlement in the area when the earls were at the height of their power in the late tenth and first half of the eleventh century. This frontier zone continued to be important to the earls in the twelfth century, particularly to Earl Haraldr Maddaðarson, who had interests in Scotland, and in the maintainance of his freedom from control by the Scottish kings, beginning at that time to encroach on the Norse earldom in the north.⁵⁷ His son Henry also 'ruled over Ross in Scotland',⁵⁸ at the beginning of the thirteenth century, but this was the tail-end of any Norse domination, and thereafter Ross was held by native overlords, eventually being created into a Scottish earldom.⁵⁹

The Norse place-names of Ross can therefore be regarded as a source fixed chronologically to the period of the late tenth to the early thirteenth century, when resurgence of Gaelic overlordship would put an end to the coining of new Norse names. They are likely to date from early in that period. This is a situation very different from the Northern Isles and Caithness where the coining of Norse names continued to take place throughout the Middle Ages, if not beyond; and it is now recognised that this continuity of Norse speech makes it rather difficult to be certain that all names in these areas date from the early centuries of Norse domination.⁶⁰ The Norse names of Ross were not altered by later Norse settlement expansion or changes. They arose in a limited period of time, and their distribution reflects the period when they were given, and the circumstances of their bestowal. A re-

⁵⁵ The Gaelic names themselves, which I am able to use only with the help of Watson's *Place-Names of Ross and Cromarty*, may also provide many important clues as to the economic and political circumstances surrounding the Norse names.

⁵⁶ Crawford, *Earl and Mormaer*.

⁵⁷ B.E. Crawford, 'Norse Earls and Scottish Bishops in Caithness: A Clash of Cultures', in *The Viking Age in Caithness, Orkney and the North Atlantic*, ed. by C.E. Batey, J. Jesch and C.D. Morris (Edinburgh, 1993), pp. 129–47 (p. 134).

⁵⁸ OS, ch. 112.

⁵⁹ A. Grant, 'The Province of Ross and the Kingdom of Alba', in E.J. Cowan and R.A. MacDonald, eds., *Alba. Celtic Scotland in the Medieval Era* (East Linton, 1999), pp. 88–126.

⁶⁰ W.P.L. Thomson, 'Orkney-farm-names: a re-assessment of their chronology', in Crawford, ed., *Scandinavian Settlement*, pp. 42–63.

markable fact is that they did not disappear in the succeeding changed linguistic circumstances, but remained fixed in the landscape.⁶¹ The reason for this may be that they were imposed by a distant controlling power for purposes of administration and exploitation, and that therefore they retained some official significance. The successor Gaelic-speaking overlords, and their officials, probably continued to use them for similar functions, and continuity of practice would have helped to maintain the Norse names in the local toponymy. The political factor also explains the continued significance of the name of Dingwall, which became the main power base and *caput* of the earls of Ross. It is unusual for *þing* names to become places of importance in later medieval, or modern times. For a better understanding of the political and economic priorities of the earls of Orkney-Caithness therefore, the Norse place-names of the province of Ross, (and perhaps also south Sutherland, which was created an earldom for the de Moravias in the first half of the thirteenth century) may provide some interesting clues about the Norse earls' organisation of their resources at the height of their power from the late tenth to the early thirteenth centuries.⁶²

⁶¹ Although there has been a loss rate in recent centuries and earlier written and cartographic sources can reveal more Norse names than appear on the current Ordnance Survey maps.

⁶² I would like to acknowledge the help and interest of Mary MacDonald, Evanton, who supplied me with invaluable help about Rossal and Langwell names throughout Norse Scotland; of Mary and Bill Atkin, who developed my inadequate understanding of horse-rearing, and horse-transport; of Richard Cox who provided very necessary specialised help with the linguistic details; of Robin Adam who volunteered much useful information on local topography; and of Nicholas Brooks who questioned my arguments! It should be stressed that this is only a 'preliminary canter' in the field of horse transport and earldom routes, and my interpretation is no doubt faulty in many respects; further explorations on the ground and discussions with local knowledgeable people are much needed for refining and developing our understanding of earldom strategies in this area.

SCANDINAVIANS IN CENTRAL SCOTLAND – BY-PLACE-NAMES AND THEIR CONTEXT

Simon Taylor

The bulk of settlement-names in Scotland were formed at a time before the documentary record begins in earnest in the twelfth century. This means that in many ways it is place-names which are Scotland's documents for the earlier Middle Ages. They are, however, notoriously difficult documents to read, partly because of the linguistic complexity of Scotland, with six main languages contributing to its place-name corpus (Pictish, Cumbric, Gaelic, Anglian, Norse, and, from the twelfth century, Scots), and in every corner of Scotland a different sequence of languages which interact in different ways. Furthermore Scotland lacks the kind of systematic study of its place-names which in England or parts of Scandinavia has been going on now for decades—in England since 1923, under the auspices of the English Place-Name Society. Such a systematic, county by county study must form the foundation of any serious attempt to use place-names in a historical, linguistic or archaeological context. Nevertheless, we are beginning to reach a better understanding of our more common place-name elements, such as *pett* and *baile*, which form part of so many of our farm-names throughout eastern mainland Scotland.¹

Unfortunately the same cannot be said about the element which appears in the title of this paper: the Scandinavian element *bý(r)*, meaning 'farm' or, especially in an EScand context, 'village'.² I want to look briefly at this element first of all in a Scotland-wide context, then in more detail in the central lowlands, and offer a hypothesis for its presence here in about

¹ See for example, W.J. Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (Edinburgh and London, 1926), pp. 407–14; G.W.S. Barrow, *Kingdom of the Scots* (London, 1973); W.F.H. Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names* (London, 1976, second impression with additional information 1979), pp. 123 ff.; S. Taylor, 'Babbet and Bridin Pudding or Polyglot Fife in the Middle Ages', *Nomina* 17 (1994), pp. 99–118 (107–13); S. Taylor, 'Some Early Scottish Place-Names and Queen Margaret', *Scottish Language* 13 (1994), pp. 1–17 (1–5).

² For a full discussion of the etymology, distribution and usage of the element *bý*, see G. Fellows-Jensen, *Scandinavian Settlement-Names in the North-West* [of England, but including Dumfries-shire], *Navnestudier* 25 (Copenhagen, 1985), pp. 10 ff. Dr Fellows-Jensen has made an enormous contribution to our understanding of this element, especially in an English context. For a convenient bibliography of Fellows-Jensen's extensive publications until 1989, see J. Spittal and J. Field, *A Reader's Guide to the Place-Names of the United Kingdom (1920–89)* (Stamford, 1990) [new, up-dated edition forthcoming]. It is primarily in a central Scottish context that the problems of interpretation remain.

twenty five place-names, all of which are listed and analysed in the Appendix. The basis of this hypothesis is that *bý*-names were introduced into central Scotland in the tenth century.

It is not a new hypothesis. I advanced it in a Fife context in 'The Scandinavians in Fife and Kinross: the Onomastic Evidence'.³ This paper in turn was building on Gillian Fellows-Jensen's ideas first expressed in her article 'Scandinavians in Southern Scotland?'⁴ Neither of these papers claimed to offer a definitive answer to the *bý*-problem, and I am not about to do so now. However, I want to take this opportunity to present, for the first time, a complete corpus of *bý*-names in the central and eastern lowlands of Scotland, and at the same time to develop some of the ideas contained in the above-mentioned articles.⁵ The map below (Fig. 1) shows the distribution of all the *bý* names which I have identified in Scotland and northernmost England. Such a map has never been published before,⁶ and partly for good reasons, since the *bý*-names in the West Highland and Island area and the Northern Isles were formed in a very different political context from those in central Scotland and northern England.⁷ Nevertheless, such a map is a good starting point. For the Northern Isles and Man I have simply given approximate overall numbers.⁸

³ Published in *Scandinavian Settlement in Northern Britain*, ed. by B.E. Crawford (London, 1995), pp. 141–67.

⁴ Published in *Nomina* 13 (1990), pp. 41–60.

⁵ This should contribute to a fairly complete inventory of *bý*-place-names on the Scottish Mainland and in the Western Isles, when combined with G. Fellows-Jensen, 'Viking Settlement in the Northern and Western Isles', in *The Northern and Western Isles in the Viking World*, ed. by A. Fenton & H. Pálsson (Edinburgh, 1984), pp. 148–68; *Idem*, *Scandinavian Settlement-Names*; *Idem*, 'Nordiske spor i det midt-skotske lavland?', in *NORNA-Rapporter* 45 (1991), pp. 65–82 [Danish version, with minor changes, of Fellows-Jensen, 'Scandinavians in Southern Scotland']; A. MacBain, 'The Norse element in the topography of the Highlands and Islands', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 19 (1894), pp. 217–45. For Orkney, see H. Marwick, *Orkney Farm-Names* (Kirkwall, 1952), and for Shetland see J. Stewart, *Shetland Place-Names* (Lerwick, 1987). Note that the West Norwegian form of this name is *bær* (See Fellows-Jensen, 'Viking Settlement', p. 155). The *r* in *bý(r)*, *bær* is a nominative singular masculine ending.

⁶ Hogbacks are shown for south and central Scotland only; not showing the twelve in English Cumbria; after B.E. Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland* (Leicester, 1987), p. 130. A map including all *bý* and *bólstaðir* names will appear in B.E. Crawford, 'The Importance of the "Vikings" in the Emergence of the Kingdom of Scotland', in *The Vikings of the Western World*, [the Proceedings of the Aalborg Conference of that name, 1996], ed. by S. Stumman-Hansen (forthcoming).

⁷ See, for example, Fellows-Jensen, 'Nordiske spor', p. 83.

⁸ These include several places called Huseby (*hús* + *bý*), which may have been early centres of administration for the earls of Orkney. See A. Steinnes, 'The Huseby System in Orkney', in *SHR* 44 (1969), pp. 36–46; W.P.L. Thomson, 'Orkney farm-names', in *Scandinavian Settlement in Northern Britain*, ed. by B.E. Crawford (London, 1995), p. 42–62.

If we look at the *by*-names in central Scotland, a number of features strike us. One is their tendency to appear in clusters. This is especially marked in East Lothian, where Humbie, Blegbie, Pogbie and Leaston (first recorded in the thirteenth century as *Laysynbi*—see Appendix) are all contiguous within the same parish (of Humbie),⁹ while Begbie lies only six km to the north. There is another cluster on the Ayrshire coast in the parishes of West Kilbride and Ardrossan, where there are two contiguous and in the same parish (Busbie and Sorbie, Ardrossan), while the third (Crosbie, West Kilbride) is separated from them by only one estate.

Another striking feature is the way in which these names repeat themselves, especially in this central lowland area. Such ‘repeat-names’ are place-names which share the same elements, and therefore share an identical or very similar form. In the Appendix all the *by*-names which are found as repeat-names within the British Isles are underlined. There are in fact only two which are unique (Pogbie and Blegbie). From this list it can be seen that two *by*-names, Busbie and Humbie, have each produced at least four place-names in the aforementioned area.

This plethora of repeat-names would seem to show a marked lack of imagination on the part of the name-givers; either that, or they were coined within a short period of time, and within a similar context, and / or in response to similar conditions. Many place-names, in all languages, and in all areas, repeat themselves of course, but given the small overall number of *by*-place-names in this area, the level of repetition is exceptionally high.

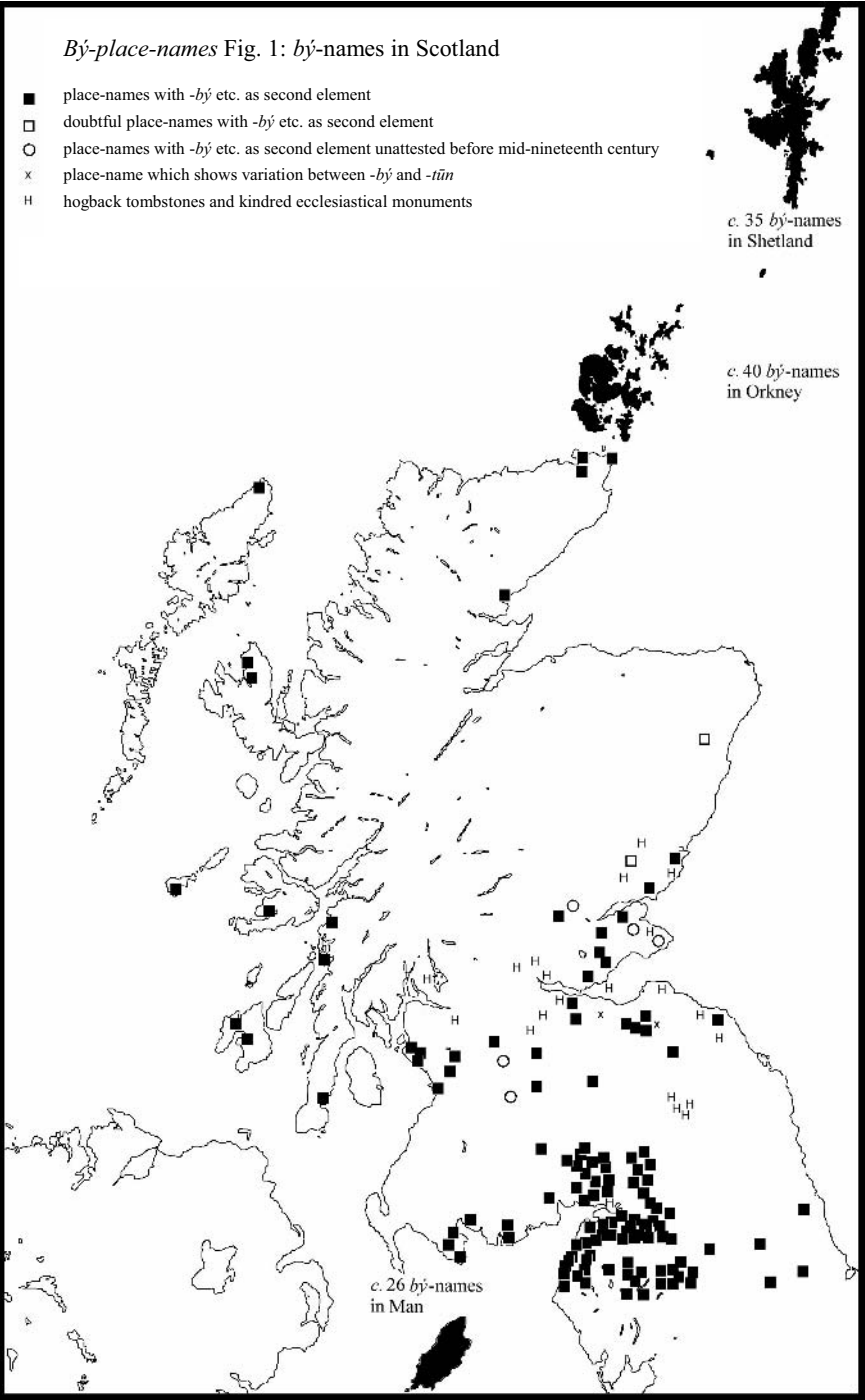
It has been suggested that Humbie was an appellative meaning ‘kennels’ or the like, which was borrowed into Older Scots or Anglian, and which only then started to generate place-names.¹⁰ If this is suggested for ‘Humbie’, then we must also posit something similar for Busby, which is as common as Humbie, and contains OScand *buski* ‘shrubbery, bush’.¹¹ But what of a name such as Bagbie or Begbie? There are two in central Scotland (see Appendix), one in Kirkcudbright in south-west Scotland, and one in the North Riding of Yorkshire. Fellows-Jensen and Nicolaisen both agree that it contains the personal name Baggi, and if so, it can hardly have been borrowed as a common noun.¹²

⁹ For more on the position of these East Lothian *by*-names, see below.

¹⁰ G.W.S. Barrow, pers. comm.; see also G.W.S. Barrow, ‘The Uses of Place-names and Scottish History: Pointers and Pitfalls’, in *The Uses of Place-Names*, ed. S. Taylor (Edinburgh, 1998), pp. 54–74 (70–72).

¹¹ Fellows-Jensen, *Scandinavians in Southern Scotland?*, p. 43.

¹² See, for example, Nicolaisen, ‘Scottish Place-Names: 29. Scandinavian Personal Names in the Place-Names of South-East Scotland’, *Scottish Studies* 11 (1967), pp. 223–36 (225).



A twelfth century context?

In the twelfth century there was a considerable influx of settlers into central Scotland, both north and south of the Forth-Clyde line, from various parts of the Anglo-Norman world, especially England and the Low Countries. This was a result of David I's policy of bringing Scottish forms of government, church organisation and land-tenure more into line with those of Anglo-Norman England and the Continent. Part of this policy included the strengthening and encouragement of trade through the establishment of burghs, usually under royal or episcopal control. It was a policy which was continued with equal enthusiasm by David's successors, his grandsons Malcolm IV (1153-65) and William I (1165-1214). There is no doubt that many of these new settlers came from parts of England where the *bý*-element was common in place-names, and it has been suggested that it was these settlers who introduced at least some *bý* place-names into central Scotland.¹³ If this was the case, it could have been done in various ways: as 1) an onomastic element; 2) a compound appellative, which became a place-name; and 3) a transferred or analogical name.¹⁴

None of these possibilities can be entirely ruled out, although they have been rejected, either explicitly or implicitly, by the two place-name scholars who have worked most intensively with this material to date: W.F. H. Nicolaisen and G. Fellows-Jensen.¹⁵ Despite Maitland's warning 'Be careful how you use your Dane', a warning reiterated recently by Geoffrey Barrow,¹⁶ I, too, am strongly inclined to see the It will be useful here to summarise the main reasons for considering these names early:

1. The personal names which can be identified with more or less certainty—Baggi, Bleiki, Corcc, Hrafn, Poca, Skati—are unknown amongst the recorded names of the twelfth-century incomers from the north of England into Scotland. They are also in stark contrast to those names combined

¹³ Barrow, 'The Uses of Place-names', pp. 70-2.

¹⁴ Grimsby in Arbroath would seem to be the best example of such a transferred name, dating most likely from the later Middle Ages. See Appendix *s.n.*.

¹⁵ Nicolaisen, 'Scandinavian Personal Names'; Fellows-Jensen, 'Scandinavians in Southern Scotland?' Dr Gillian Fellows-Jensen is now more inclined to see these Scottish names a result of analogical naming than she was in her articles on this subject, although she would still not rule out an early date for their formation (pers. comm.).

¹⁶ Barrow, 'The Uses of Place-names', p. 70.

with *bý* which we know to have been coined in the late eleventh and twelfth century in north-west England and south-west Scotland.¹⁷

2. The specific elements which are not personal names seem mainly to be OScand, not Older Scots, as would be expected if they were borrowed in the twelfth or thirteenth century. In fact there are no specifics which could not be OScand, although some have close cognates in Older Scots.¹⁸

3. The discontinuity of the distribution of these names between Yorkshire and County Durham on the one hand and south-east Scotland on the other, with a total lack of them in present-day Northumberland (between Tyne and Tweed). For more on this, see also below.

Apart from the high frequency of repeat-names, already alluded to, another common feature of *bý*-names in central Scotland is that, when they enter the written record, usually in the later Middle Ages, or the early modern period, they are on royal land, or are in baronies held directly of the crown.

Examples are:

bý-names of central Scotland as considerably pre-dating the twelfth century.

Begbie, Haddington ELO, which formed part of the royal lands of Haddington, and was given to Haddington nunnery by the foundress, Ada de Warenne the queen-mother, who died in 1178.

Busbie and **Sorbie**, both in Ardrossan parish AYR. They formed part of the barony of Ardrossan, which was granted by King Robert I to Sir Fergus of Ardrossan in the early fourteenth century.¹⁹ This might, however, simply be royal confirmation of long-standing possession of the area by Fergus' predecessors.

Busby, East Kilbride LAN: It lies in the north-west corner of the parish, on the White Cart River, which at this point forms the boundary between

¹⁷ Even these were probably not new coinings; see Fellows-Jensen, *Scandinavian Settlement-Names*, pp. 22–4, where she suggests that Anglo-Norman and Flemish personal names such as Lochard and Lambert were substituted for older specifics in pre-existing *bý*-names.

¹⁸ For example OScand *kross* 'cross' (as a Christian symbol), a loan-word from Old / Middle Irish, itself a loan-word from Latin (see Fellows-Jensen, *Scandinavian Settlement-Names*, p. 28); in names which were coined with this word in an Older Scots-speaking environment, it often has the extended meaning 'crossing', eg Corston, Strathmiglo FIF—'farm of the crossing place', the crossing place here being a causeway over a boggy river-valley (see S. Taylor, 'Settlement-Names in Fife', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, pp. 325–6). Although the various Newby-names are said to contain Anglo-Saxon *nīwe*, *nēowe* (Fellows-Jensen, *Scandinavian Settlement-Names*, pp. 37 and 333), there is no reason to doubt that they originally contained OScand *ný*, later assimilated to its close West Germanic cognate.

¹⁹ *Registrum Magni Sigilli Regum Scottorum*, [RMS], ed. by J.M. Thomson *et al.*, 1882–1914; i, no. 51 and vii, no. 642.

Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire. The village of Busby now spans the river, and is partly in each county. In 1490 it is described as being in the lordship of Kilbride LAN. Note that (East) Kilbride is royal demesne and appears in *ER*²⁰ e.g. at 1359 and 1450. In the late fourteenth century Robert III grants the barony of regality of *Kylbryd* to his natural son James Stewart.

Busby, Methven PER, formed part of the royal demesne land of Methven as late as the sixteenth century.

Humbie (parish) ELO, including **Blegbie**, **Pogbie** and **Leaston**. This was a subdivision of the early royal shire or territory of Keith. The parish was known originally as Keith-Humbie.²¹ Keith appears to have been a shire-sized unit which was split up in the early twelfth century. *Keth* was given to Dunfermline Abbey by Alexander I.²² According to Cowan,²³ the lands of Keith were subdivided in the reign of David I, the part belonging to Simon Fraser becoming known as Keith-Simon, later Keith-Humbie, while another part belonging to one Hervey became known as Keith-Hervey, later Keith-Marischal (*Kethmarchal* c. 1250²⁴). During the twelfth century Keith-Humbie was the parish kirk of Keith.

Newby Peebles PEB: the lands of Newby are crown lands when they first appear in 1359.²⁵

Weathersbie †, Auchterderran FIF, formerly part of the royal constabulary of Kinghorn. It lay in an area which was royal hunting forest when it first appears in the mid-twelfth century.²⁶

It is possible, in fact, to reconstruct an early tenurial history for most of the *by*-names in central Scotland. The conclusion which emerges, albeit tentatively, is that there is a relatively high degree of correlation between a *by*-place-name and early royal control.

²⁰ *The Exchequer Rolls of Scotland*, [ER], ed. by J. Stuart et al., 1878–1908.

²¹ *Kethundeby*, c. 1250, *Liber Cartarum Prioratus Sancti Andree in Scotia* [St A. Lib.], Bannatyne Club, 1841, p. 30; for more details, see I.B. Cowan, *The Parishes of Medieval Scotland*, Scottish Records Society 93 (1967), p. 92. Keith is a from a Cumbric word related to Modern Welsh *coed*, meaning ‘woodland’. See Watson, *Celtic Place-Names*, pp. 381–2.

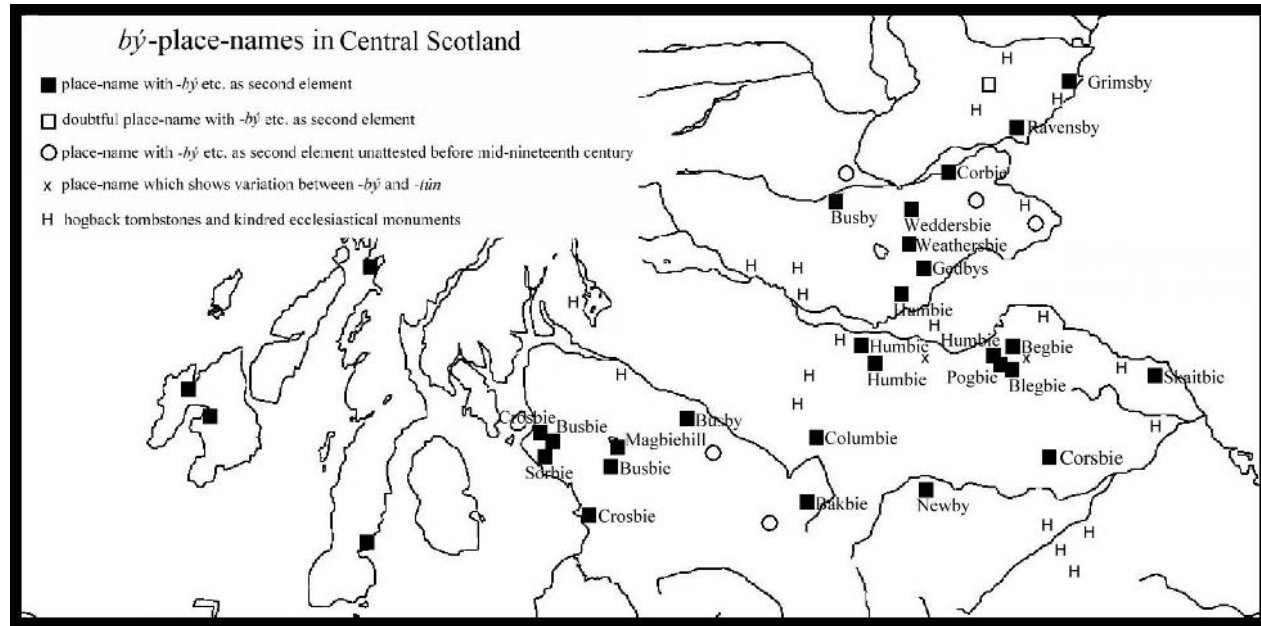
²² *Registrum de Dunfermelyn*, [Dunf. Reg.], Bannatyne Club 1842, no. 2.

²³ Cowan, *Parishes*, p. 92.

²⁴ *St And. Lib.*, p. 30.

²⁵ *ER* i, p. 566.

²⁶ Unpublished charter SRO GD 212/15/42 (nineteenth-century transcript), dated 1165x72, by which the royal *forestum* of *Cardenni* or *Cardenin* (i.e. Carden, now Auchterderran parish) was granted to a certain MacDuff. See also J. Bannerman, ‘MacDuff of Fife’, in *Medieval Scotland, Crown, Lordship and Community*, ed. by A. Grant and K.J. Stringer (Edinburgh, 1993), pp. 20–38 (32, and footnote 5).



Bý-place-names Fig. 2: *bý*-names in Central Scotland

The Tenth Century in Southern Scotland and Northern England

The political situation in the tenth century in what is now northern England and southern Scotland was highly complex and fluctuating, more so than in almost any other century of the early historic period, and certainly more so than in any century since. The overriding dynamic was the expansion of Scotland (Alba) from the north and of Wessex from the south. The whole area from the Forth to the Humber on the east had become a kind of debatable land, coveted not only by Alba and Wessex, but also by the Scandinavians from Dublin (chiefly Norwegian) and York (chiefly Danish), who exploited the strong Scandinavian presence centred on York.

At certain crucial times during this period important alliances were formed between the kings of Alba and the Scandinavian kings of Dublin and York, in the face of Wessex expansionism from the south. At the same time, this was the period when Alba, the Scoto-Pictish kingdom north of the Firth of Forth on the east, and north and east of the kingdom of Strathclyde in the west,²⁷ was expanding southwards.

While the Wessex approach to Scandinavian presence in Northumbria was based on direct and increasingly confident superior strength, the approach from the kings of Alba was of necessity more conciliatory and subtle. The policy of several of the kings of tenth-century Alba may have been one of encouragement to Scandinavian ambitions in (southern) Northumbria. They may have seen it as in their interest to have a small Norse kingdom as a buffer between them and Wessex to the south.²⁸ They also were more vulnerable to the potential of the combined forces of a hostile Scandinavian Dublin-York axis.²⁹ This pro-Scandinavian policy was cultivated particularly by Cusantín (Constantine) II, king of Alba from 900 to 943, who dominated northern politics for almost half a century. It finds cultural-linguistic as well as political expression in that Cusantín's eldest son probably had a Scandinavian name—Indulf or Ildulf (reigned 954–62); Indulf's eldest son Culén, king from 966 to 971, had a Scandinavian by-name,

²⁷ The kingdom of Strathclyde at its greatest northern extent stretched as far as Glen Falloch, north of Loch Lomond. See Barrow, *Kingdom*, p. 142.

²⁸ For a general survey of this period, see A.P. Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men* (Edinburgh, 1984), ch. 6.

²⁹ For a full historical discussion of this period, see F.M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (third ed.) (Oxford, 1971), 319–63; Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men*, p. 193 ff.; and Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, pp. 58–60. See also the historical summary in Taylor, 'The Scandinavians in Fife', pp. 144–5.

Ring (from *hringr* 'ring' i.e. a generous lord), while Indulf's second son bore the Scandinavian name 'Olaf'.³⁰

Within this general context it would come as no surprise to find the Scottish kings of the tenth century encouraging limited Scandinavian settlement within their kingdom, especially within those areas in which the Scots themselves were only beginning to establish real and lasting control. The expansion of Alba into both Lothian and Strathclyde is a process which is still not fully understood, but the tenth century would appear to be the period when there was a major shift in Lothian from Northumbrian and towards Scottish control.³¹ For at least part of the century the border between Scottish and Northumbrian spheres of influence was formed by the Lammermuir Hills, and it may well be significant that the remarkable cluster of *bý*-names in Humble parish ELO (for which see above) sits immediately below these hills' north-eastern edge, some sixteen km from the coast. The question is justified as to whether this cluster is perhaps evidence of Scandinavian settlement countenanced or even positively encouraged by the kings of Alba on the very south-east frontier of their expanding kingdom.

The political situation in the kingdom of Strathclyde in the tenth century is equally unclear, although there are several important parallels with Lothian in this period.³² Two important dates stand out. In 870 the Scandinavians based in eastern Ireland captured the chief fortress of Strathclyde at Dumbarton, and took many hundreds prisoner, including the Strathclyde king Arthgal; and in 945 King Edmund of Wessex harried Strathclyde and formally acknowledged the suzerainty there of Mael Coluim I king of Alba. There is no doubt that the Strathclyde royal dynasty lasted until the death of the last recorded king, Ywain, in 1018, but historians disagree as to the extent of Scottish control there between the fall of Dumbarton in 870 and the

³⁰See Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men*, p. 210; B. E. Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland* (Leicester, 1987), p. 60, and Taylor, 'The Scandinavians in Fife', p. 145; for a non-Scandinavian interpretation of this evidence, see B.T. Hudson, *Kings of Celtic Scotland* (Westport, Connecticut 1994), pp. 89–90 and 93–4.

³¹See Barrow, *Kingdom*, p. 148 ff.; see also M.O. Anderson 'Lothian and the early Scottish kings', in SHR 39, pp. 98–112, and Duncan, *Scotland: The Making of the Kingdom* (Edinburgh 1975), p. 94.

³²For a useful discussion of this confusing period, see for example A. Macquarrie, 'The Kings of Strathclyde, c. 400–1018', in *Medieval Scotland, Crown, Lordship and Community*, ed. by A. Grant & K.J. Stringer (Edinburgh, 1993), pp. 1–19; see also Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men*, p. 215 ff. and the bibliographical notes, pp. 242–4. A recent important contribution to the debate is S.T. Driscoll, 'Church archaeology in Glasgow and the kingdom of Strathclyde', *Innes Review* 49 (2) (1998), pp. 95–114, where he argues from archaeological evidence centred on Govan that there was a significant Norse component in the rulership of Strathclyde from the late ninth century and throughout the tenth (see especially *loc. cit.* pp. 112–3).

death of Ywain.³³ Whatever the details, the overall picture is similar to that in Lothian: of increasing Scottish control, culminating in the annexing of Strathclyde after 1018. And, as with Lothian, conditions would have been ideal for sporadic settlement of Scandinavians actively encouraged by the encroaching Scottish hegemony.

Within this context it is instructive to look at the place-name Busby / Busbie. This occurs in central Scotland four times—twice in Ayrshire, once in Lanarkshire, and once in Perthshire. Its meaning of ‘shrubbery- or bush farm’ might suggest that Norse-speakers who coined the name had taken over run-down or overgrown lands. None of the Busby / Busbie farms is on particularly marginal land, and so there is no reason to believe that they were first assarted by the Scandinavian name-givers. It is more likely that the Scandinavians were given, with royal sanction, lands which had formerly been occupied and worked, but which had, perhaps due to the unsettled conditions of the time, become waste.

Whatever the circumstances of settlement, it is unlikely that it took place without the sanction of whoever held the lordship of the various districts in question. Even if some of the central lowland Scandinavian settlement took place at a time when no clear authority was perceptible in Strathclyde or Lothian—or at least no longer perceptible to us—and perhaps even took advantage of this state of affairs, the fact that the names of the estates survived a lengthy period of Gaelic-speaking hegemony in these areas (from the tenth to the twelfth century) shows that they were probably rooted in settlement if not initiated by, then at least sanctioned from, above. This is even more true of areas such as Fife and Strathearn, in south-central Perthshire, areas which were firmly under the control of the Scottish dynasty established there in the mid-ninth century.

From Fife there is in fact a possible echo of tenth-century Norse settlement under royal control, in the incident of the *Hibernienses* at Kirkness, Portmoak KNR (formerly FIF). I have argued elsewhere that the designation *Hibernienses* may well refer to the Hiberno-Norse, and that an argument can be made for a mid-tenth-century date.³⁴ The story is found within a charter issued by King Macbethad (1040-57) and his consort, Queen Gruoch, by which they grant lands with the Scandinavian name of Kirkness to the nearby Céli Dé monastery of St Serf’s, Loch Leven. It was written originally in Gaelic, but was translated into Latin probably in the later thir-

³³ Two differing interpretations of the scanty evidence can be found in Macquarrie, *Kings of Strathclyde*, and Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men*.

³⁴ See Taylor, ‘The Scandinavians in Fife’, pp. 147–8.

teenth century, and has been preserved in the cartulary of St Andrews Priory.³⁵

We also have a quite different material indicator for Scandinavian presence in central Scotland in the tenth century. These are the so-called hogback tombstones. The possible connection between them and Norse settlement as evidenced by names in *bý* in southern Scotland was first mooted by Barbara Crawford.³⁶ It is for this reason that they have been included on the maps. Although it is clear from this that there is little direct correlation between the presence of a hogback and place-names in *bý*, both show the same general range, and point to a light but pervasive Norse influence throughout the central lowlands of Scotland in this period.

Any model for the explanation of *bý*-names in central Scotland must take into account the complete absence of such names in Northumberland.³⁷ This means that they cannot simply be seen as spreading gradually northwards into south-eastern Scotland from the north of England.³⁸ During the first century of the Scandinavian occupation of what later became north-east England (from the 860s), the area between the Humber and the southern limit of the hegemony of the kings of Alba was divided into two distinct, though often closely connected, spheres of influence. To the south was the Scandinavian kingdom centred on York, while to the north lay an area under the sway of Anglian ealdormen based at Bamburgh. The two parts were not politically united until 954, following the death of King Eiríkr Bloodaxe, when the English king, Eadred (946-55), placed the whole area under the sway of the Bamburgh ealdorman Osulf (954-969).³⁹ It was this unit which eventually fell into the hands of the Danish Earl Siward, who ruled there from about 1031 to 1055. It is this absence of *bý*-names in northern Northumbria which suggests perhaps most strongly that the *bý*-names in central

³⁵ It has been printed several times: in *St A. Lib.*, p. 114; W. Reeves, *The Culdees of the British Islands* (Dublin, 1864, reprinted Felinfach, 1994); and *Early Scottish Charters prior to 1153 [ESC]*, ed. A.C. Lawrie (1905), no. 5. The only translation into English which has hitherto appeared in print is that in G. Donaldson, 'Aspects of early Scottish conveyancing', in *Formulary of Old Scots Legal Documents*, ed. P. Goulesbrough, Stair Society 36 (1985), pp. 153-86 (156-7). I am at present working on a new edition of this and other early Loch Leven documents.

³⁶ Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, pp. 172-4; see also Fellows-Jensen, 'Scandinavians in Southern Scotland', pp. 53-4.

³⁷ Fellows-Jensen, 'Nordiske spor', p. 45-6 and Watts, 'Northumberland and Durham: the place-name evidence', in *Scandinavian Settlement in Northern Britain*, ed. B.E. Crawford (London, 1995), pp. 206-13 (206 ff.).

³⁸ Nor can they be seen as having spread from the south-west; see Fellows-Jensen, 'Scandinavians in Southern Scotland', p. 45.

³⁹ For a good summary of the history of this period, see R. Lomas, *County of Conflict: Northumberland from Conquest to Civil War* (East Linton, 1996), pp. 5-8.

Scotland were formed at a time when northern Northumbria was politically distinct from southern Northumbria; that is before the later tenth century. It is otherwise very difficult to explain the lack of a continuum between the *bý*-names in County Durham and Yorkshire on the one hand, and Berwickshire and East Lothian on the other. The onomastic impulse which created the small number of *bý*-names in the later twelfth century between the Tees and the Northumberland Tyne, as identified by Watts,⁴⁰ appears to have been generated by the dense number of older *bý*-names immediately to the south, and did not extend north of the Tyne.⁴¹

In a recent article Barbara Crawford has argued that *bý*-names may have been a result of the intense Northumbrian influence in southern Scotland dating from the time immediately following the death of Earl Siward. The Scottish prince Mael Coluim mac Dunchada, who later became the Scottish king Mael Coluim III (1058-93), spent fourteen years in exile, chiefly at Siward's court, and received vital support from Siward in his attempt to seize the throne from King Macbethad (1040-57). 'Malcolm would inevitably have come back to Scotland with his own following drawn from the Anglo-Danish community of Northumbria . . . with whom he would have forged bonds of loyalty and military companionship.'⁴² This could certainly be responsible for several Anglo-Scandinavian features of Scottish administration and social organisation,⁴³ but the above-mentioned discontinuity of the *bý*-names in north-east England alone argues against this as an explanation for the *bý*-names in central Scotland. In addition to this, we have definite Scandinavian echoes in central Scotland which go back to before the reign of Mael Coluim III: for example the place-name Kirkness, discussed above; and the presence of a son of Thorfinn in Fife during the reign of King Macbethad.⁴⁴

Attention has been frequently drawn to the high number of Scandinavian, or Anglo-Scandinavian, names which appear in the earliest Scottish

⁴⁰ Watts, 'Northumberland and Durham', pp. 210-11, and figs 41 and 42; see also V. Watts, 'Scandinavian Settlement-Names in County Durham', *Nomina* 12 (1989), pp. 17-63.

⁴¹ See maps in Watts, 'Northumberland and Durham', pp. 208 and 210.

⁴² Crawford, 'Importance of the Vikings'. I am grateful to Dr Barbara Crawford for allowing me to see her article in typescript.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ The land called *Bolgin filii Thorfini* (Bogie, by Kirkcaldy FIF) was given to the Céli Dé of Loch Leven by King Macbethad (*St A. Lib.*, pp. 12, 15 and 43; see also Taylor, *The Scandinavians in Fife*, p. 146). Note also Corstorphin MLO, an 'inversion compound' showing strong Gaelic influence; as well as the now lost Incheturphin, Kinclaven parish, south-east Perthshire, combining with Scottish Gaelic *innis* 'haughland, low-lying land beside a river'. It first appears c. 1160 as one of the lands belonging to the parish church of the Holy Trinity of Dunkeld (see *Dunf. Reg.* no. 123). Both these names, although first recorded in the twelfth century, were probably coined earlier than the reign of Mael Coluim III.

charters in the late eleventh and twelfth century, as well as those combined with the Older Scots generic element *toun*.⁴⁵ They are however ‘in a completely different category’ from those combined with the *by*-element,⁴⁶ and in fact are best assigned to the influx of Anglo-Scandinavians from the north of England into southern Scotland as the results of the innovative policies of David I and his immediate successors. They may, however, have augmented and strengthened a Scandinavian element already introduced by Mael Coluim III, as suggested by Crawford.⁴⁷

Concluding Remarks

A closer inspection of the evidence as set out above leads me to support Fellows-Jensen’s statement that she is ‘inclined to look upon the *-by* names in the Central Lowlands as indication of settlement in the ninth and tenth centuries’,⁴⁸ although I would give more emphasis to the later rather than earlier end of her date-range. More work is still to be done. Further fruitful lines of enquiry would include the detailed physical study of the individual sites involved, as well as further work on the tenorial history of each one. This would of course also have to include the study of ‘control groups’, so that a comparative study of the tenorial history of other place-name generics can be placed alongside that of the *by*-names, in order to be able to say with confidence that they do indeed show a higher degree of royal connection than other comparable place-names. Also any study of *by*-names should take into account the Gaelic element *gall* ‘foreigner’, often ‘Scandinavian’, which occurs in many Scottish place-names. Such a study has been done for Fife and Kinross,⁴⁹ but should be extended throughout Scotland.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ See especially Nicolaisen, ‘Scandinavian Personal Names’; also Taylor, ‘The Scandinavians in Fife’, pp. 150–2 and 160–2, and Crawford, ‘Importance of the Vikings’.

⁴⁶ Nicolaisen, ‘Scandinavian Personal Names’, p. 235.

⁴⁷ Crawford, ‘Importance of the Vikings’. See also above.

⁴⁸ Fellows-Jensen, ‘Scandinavians in Southern Scotland’, p. 55.

⁴⁹ See Taylor, ‘The Scandinavians in Fife’, especially pp. 142–3, 148–50 and 158–9.

⁵⁰ I would like to express my warm thanks to Dr Gillian Fellows-Jensen, Dr Barbara Crawford and Mr Michael Davidson for reading and commenting on earlier drafts of this article.

Appendix

Bý(r)-names in central Scotland, parallels elsewhere, and related names

Those names underlined are found more than once within the British Isles. National Grid reference is given, where known, only for those places not on modern Ordnance Survey maps. Doubtful forms are also included.

BAKBIE Wiston & Robertson LAN approx. NS94 28

(templeland etc. in) villa de *Bakbie* 1668 *Retours* i Lanark no. 309 [part of the barony of Robertson]⁵¹

Bagbie 1682 Court Roll of Lanarkshire

This is the same name as Begbie ELO (see below), and contains the personal name Baggi, which is found in both OW and OEScand.⁵² Compare Bagby, Kirkmabreck KCB (*Bagby* 1534 *RMS* iii no. 1387); and Bagby YON England (*Bag{h}ebi* 1086; *Baggaby* c. 1160⁵³).

BATTLEBY Redgorton PER

Not recorded before 1855, it appears to be a modern coining, inspired by its proximity to the site of the historically dubious ‘Battle of Luncarty AD 990’, as recorded on the first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1860 (at NO097286). It was formerly the farm-house at Redgorton ‘enlarged and transformed into the comfortable dwelling now called Battleby’ in the mid nineteenth century.⁵⁴

BEGBIE Haddington ELO

(lands of) *Bagby* x1178 *RMS* ii no. 610

Baigbie 1594 *Retours*

Begbie ‘vel’ *Baikbie* 1649 *Retours*

This is the same name as Bakbie LAN (see above). The lands of Begbie were given to Haddington nunnery by its founder Ada de Warenne, the Queen Mother, who died 1178.

BLEGBIE Humble ELO

Blackby 1590s Pont (Blaeu)

Wester Blackbie 1639 *Retours*

Wester Blaikbie 1659 *Retours*

Blackbie 1659 *Retours*

Blackbie 1687 *Retours*

Wester Blackbie 1687 *Retours*

There is no parallel to this name elsewhere in the British Isles. It may contain an otherwise unrecorded personal name derived from OScand *bleikr* ‘pale’⁵⁵; alternatively it may contain *bleikr* as an adjective describing ‘the local vegetation or perhaps refer[ring] to the activity of bleaching’.⁵⁶

BRYMBY †

Brymby 1329 *ER* i, p. 219

Appears only once. From its context, it would seem to be somewhere in Angus.

⁵¹ *Retours Inquisitionum ad capellam domini regis retornatarum ... abbreviatio*, Rec. Com., 3 vols (1811–16).

⁵² See Nicolaisen, ‘Scandinavian Personal Names’, p. 225.

⁵³ E. Ekwall, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, fourth edition (Oxford, 1960), s.n.

⁵⁴ E. Maxtone Graham, *The Maxtones of Cultoquhey* (Edinburgh and London 1935), p. 197. I am grateful to Mr Angus Watson for the references anent Battleby.

⁵⁵ Nicolaisen, ‘Scandinavian Personal Names’, p. 225.

⁵⁶ Fellows-Jensen, ‘Scandinavians in Southern Scotland’, p. 51.

BUSBIE Ardrossan AYR(chaplaincy of) *Busbie* 1606 *RMS* vi no. 1838*Busbie Meikill & Littill* 1609 *RMS* vii no. 642

The lands and vills of Busbie formed part of barony of Ardrossan. Robert I granted in fee and heritage to Sir Fergus of Ardrossan all his (*i.e.* Fergus') lands of *Ardrossane*', to be held of the king in free barony (1315x21 *RMS* i no. 51).

The specific is OScand *buski* 'shrubbery'. For a further discussion of its meaning, see above. The specific in Bysbie, Whithorn WIG, is more likely to be *biskup* 'bishop'.⁵⁷ This name is found four times in Scotland (see below), as well as once in the North Riding of Yorkshire (*Buschebi* in Domesday Book, and *Buskebi* & *Buskeby* c.1185⁵⁸).

BUSBIE Kilmaurs AYR*Busby* 1465 *RMS* ii no. 940 [part of the lands of the Mowatts of Busby]*Buskie-Fergushill* 1554 *RMS* iv no. 937 [8½ merks worth of land feued to Robert Fergushill]

For a discussion of the name, see Busbie, Ardrossan AYR above.

BUSBY East Kilbride LAN (now LAN & RNF)*Busby* 1490 *RMS* ii no. 1936*Busby* 1503 *RMS* ii no. 2700

For a discussion of the name, see Busbie, Ardrossan AYR above.

BUSBY Methven PER£3 6/8d de firmis de *Estirbusby*; 40/- de firmis terrarum de *Westrebusby* (in lordship of *Methfen*) 1451 *ER* v, 482*Ester Busbye* & *Wester Busby* 1510 [given by King James IV to the collegiate church of Methven]

In 1451 the fermes of both Easter and Wester Busby are due to the Crown. For a discussion of the name, see Busbie, Ardrossan AYR above.

COLUMBIE Carstairs LAN

Columbie 1604 *RMS* vii no. 746*Columbie-wallis* 1612 *RMS* vii no. 658 ['cum fortalicio']Thos. Hamilton of *Columbie* 1612 *RMS* vii no. 746*Columby* 1615⁵⁹

If this is a genuine *by*-name, then it would seem to contain the Gaelic male personal name Colm (from Latin Columba). Names of Gaelic origin such as Gilli and Corcc (for which see next name [Corbie]) show that such borrowing was common after the Norse had come into intensive cultural and commercial contact with Gaelic-speakers.

CORBIE Balmerino FIF:*Corby* c.1212 NLS Adv. MS 15.1.18 no. 46 [original charter]*Corbi* 1232 *Balm. Lib.* no. 1⁶⁰*Cortiby* or *Corciby* c.1235 *Balm. Lib.* no. 7(all king's land of...) *Corbi* 1235 *Balm. Lib.* no. 56

⁵⁷ R. D. Oram, 'Scandinavian settlement in south-west Scotland with a special study of Bysbie', in *Scandinavian Settlement in Northern Britain*, ed. B.E. Crawford (Leicester, 1995), pp. 127–40 (pp. 135–40).

⁵⁸ Ekwall, *English Place-Names*, s.n..

⁵⁹ J.P. Miller, 'Interesting and Local Place-Names: How they originated', *Hamilton Advertiser* (1931–2) (typescript *penes* School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh), p. 42.

⁶⁰ *Liber Sancte Marie de Balmorinach*, Abbotsford Club (1841).

Corbiden 1235 *Balm. Lib.* no. 56

Personal name 'Corcc' + OS cand. *bý(r)* 'farm'. The personal name was borrowed by the Hiberno-Scandinavians from Irish, where the name is well attested.⁶¹ It would then be exactly parallel with Corby CMB, which appears in the twelfth century as *Chorkeby* and *Corchebi*, and in the fourteenth as *Corcabi*.⁶² Those places in Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire called Corby derive from the OS cand personal name Kori.⁶³

It lay on the estate of Birkhill on the Tay, and the name survives in nearby Corbie Den, and Corbiehill.

CORSBIE Legerwood BWK

(barony of) *Crossebie* c.1325 *RMS* i app.2 no. 272

Corsby 1396 *ER*

OWScand *kross* 'cross'; 'farm at or near a cross or crosses'. This is the same name as Crosbie, Dundonald and Crosbie, West Kilbride AYR. See also above footnote 18.

Compare Corsby WIG, as well as five places called Crosby in England, all in the north-west (CMB twice, LNC, WML twice) and one in the Isle of Man.⁶⁴

CROSBIE West Kilbride AYR

Corsbie-Crawfuirde 1626 *Retours* ii AyR no. 240 [in barony of Stevenston]

Crosbie 1642 *Retours* ii AyR no. 364

For a discussion of the name, see Corsbie, Legerwood BWK above.

GEDBYS † Kirkcaldy and Dysart, formerly Kirkcaldy, NT260922

Gaidbie 1647 *RMS* ix no. 1833

Gaitvie 1665 *RMS* xi no. 844

Goatbie 1782 *Sasines* no. 385

Gedbys 1850s Ordnance Survey

? OS cand *geit*, 'she-goat'. It lay on the north-eastern slopes of Raith Hill, on the lands of Abbotshall, which were part of Kirkcaldy-shire, given to the church of Dunfermline by Mael Coluim III and Margaret in the later eleventh century.

GRIMSBY Arbroath & St Vigeans ANG

ly Grymmysbe (in the burgh of Arbroath) 1525 *Arb. Lib.* ii, 440⁶⁵

Still extant in the modern street-name of East Grimsby, and formerly referring to an area immediately beside the harbour at Arbroath; given the important trading links between Grimsby LNC and the east coast of Scotland in the later medieval period,⁶⁶ it is very possible that the name was imported as a name to Arbroath in that period.

HUMBIE Humble ELO

ecclesia de Kethundeby c.1250 *Dunf. Reg.* 204 & *St A. Lib.* 30

The first element is probably the genitive plural of Scand *hund(r)* 'dog'.⁶⁷ It was a subdivision of the early royal shire or territory of Keith (see above). It is one of at least four Humbles in southern Scotland.

The name also occurs in Lincolnshire, England: as Hanby and Humby.⁶⁸

⁶¹ Fellows-Jensen, 'Nordiske spor', p. 74.

⁶² Ekwall, *English Place-Names*, s.n..

⁶³ *Ibid.*, s.n.. For a further discussion see Taylor, 'The Scandinavians in Fife', especially p. 155.

⁶⁴ Fellows-Jensen, *Scandinavian Settlement-Names*, index.

⁶⁵ *Liber S. Thome de Aberbrothoc*, Bannatyne Club 1848–56.

⁶⁶ See E. Gillet, *The History of Grimsby* (London, 1970), p. 49. I am grateful to Mr Whiten of Grimsby for drawing my attention to this information.

⁶⁷ Taylor, 'The Scandinavians in Fife', pp. 155–6.

⁶⁸ Taylor, 'The Scandinavians in Fife', p. 156, fn. 19.

HUMBIE Aberdour FIF*Humbies* 1517 *Fife Ct. Bk.* 399⁶⁹*Humble* 1574 *Inchcolm Chrs.* 219⁷⁰(lands of *lie Midilthrid & Norththrid* [of *Abirdour*] ‘alias’) *lie Eister & Wester**Humbies* 1630 *RMS* viii no. 1690

See Humbie ELO above.⁷¹ It was part of the demesne land of Aberdour, as is implied by the 1630 entry quoted above.

HUMBIE’S HILL Crawfordjohn LAN

On OS Pathfinder map. The genitive *s* suggests a surname derived from a place-name, although no such name is to be found in Black, *Surnames*.⁷² It is not included amongst the extensive list of place-names in Miller, ‘Interesting and Local Place-Names’.

HUMBIE HOUSE Stonehouse LAN NS73 45

A house on the bank of the Avon Water. It appears as such on OS 1 inch 7th series, but as Humble House in R. Hooker’s OS Pathfinder Gazetteer. It is not included amongst the extensive list of place-names in Miller, ‘Interesting and Local Place-Names’.

HUMBIE Kirknewton MLO*Humby* 1546 *RMS* iii no. 3289 [held by the Ruthvens]

See Humbie ELO above.

HUMBIE Kirkliston WLO*Hundeby* 1290 *RMS* v no. 2271*Hundby* 1481 *RMS* ii*Humby* 1503 *Pitfirrane Writs*

See Humbie ELO above. It is first mentioned (in 1290) as land belonging to the bishop of St Andrews.

LEASTON Humbie ELOvilla de *Laysynbi* 1294 *Chron. Lanercost*, p. 155⁷³

Contains OS *scand leysing(r)* or *leysingi* ‘freed man’, in either singular or plural form, although it can also be used as a personal name—a *judex* of Cumbria was called Leising in the early twelfth century (*ESC* nos. 20, 50 & 153). This would appear to be a genuine Scand place-name, in which the less common *bý* has been replaced by the more common but semantically related *toun*.⁷⁴ For a different process involving the interchange between *bý* and *tūn* or *toun*, see Smeaton below. It would not be surprising to find such a name beside the marked cluster of *bý*-names in this area, for which see above. Compare also Lazenby YON and CMB.

The same specific, in the genitive singular, is found in Leaston, Cargill parish PER, *Lesingstoun* c.1350 *RMS* i app.2 no. 1104. It appears as ‘villa Laysing’ or ‘villa Laising’ c.1220, when it belongs to William de Montfiquet (Muschet), as part of his lands of Cargill (*Coupar Angus Chrs.* i, nos. 30 & 31).⁷⁵

⁶⁹ *Fife Ct. Bk. The Sheriff Court Book of Fife 1515–22*, ed. W.C. Dickinson, Scottish History Society [SHS] (1928).

⁷⁰ *Charters of the Abbey of Inchcolm*, ed. D.E. Easson & A. Macdonald, SHS (1938).

⁷¹ See also Taylor, ‘The Scandinavians in Fife’, pp. 155–6.

⁷² G.F. Black, *The Surnames of Scotland* (New York, 1946; repr. Edinburgh, 1993).

⁷³ *Chronicon de Lanercost*, Maitland Club (1839).

⁷⁴ Another possibility is that the Lanercost chronicler, who was writing in an area in which *-bý*-names were common (Cumberland), either consciously or subconsciously substituted *-bi* for an original **-toun*.

⁷⁵ *Charters of the Abbey of Coupar Angus*, ed. D.E. Easson, SHS (1947).

MAGBIEHILL Stewarton AYR*Makbehill & M[ak]behyll* 1451 *RMS* ii nos.484 & 485*Makbehill* 1564 *RMS* iv no. 1509? OScand *maki* 'customer, partner, mate'.⁷⁶ Cf. Mabie KCB?NEWBY by Peebles PEB(lands of) *Newby* 1359 *ER* i, 566 [not paying its annual rent to the crown because the lands lie waste]*Newbi* 1368 *RRS* vi no. 413⁷⁷*Newby* 1513 *RMS* ii no. 3826Presumably originally OScand *ny-* 'new', later assimilated to Scots *new*, from Anglo-Saxon *nīwe* 'new'.

Compare Newbie DMF and numerous parallels in both north-west and north-east England (CMB twice, WML, YON thrice and YOW thrice).

POGBIE Humble ELO

(chaplain Adam de) *Pokby* 1238x70 *Midl. Chrs.* no. 33⁷⁸*Poikbie* 1659 *Retours*It would appear to contain the personal name Poca.⁷⁹ Compare Pockthorpe YOE and Norfolk (where it occurs seven times) and Pockley YON.⁸⁰ It may, however, contain the Scand *pūki* 'evil spirit, devil', related to Anglo-Saxon *pūca*, same meaning.⁸¹RAVENSBY Barry ANG*Renisby* 1590s Pont*Ravinsby* 1685 *Panm. Reg.* ii, 343⁸²*Ravensby* 1890s OS 1 inch first ednCf Ravensby † LEI; this probably contains the personal name Hrafn, rather than the OScand *hrafn* 'raven'.⁸³

(RIGBY Ceres FIF)

This does not seem to be much earlier than 1913.⁸⁴(SELBIE Keithhall and Kinkell ABD)*Selby* 1469 *ER* vii, 649*Selvye* 1511 *RMS* ii no. 3600*Selbie* 1610 *RMS* vii no. 372

See Silvie ANG below.

(SILVIE Ruthven ANG)*Selby* 1783 Stobie's Map*Selby* 1788 Ainslie's MapThe variation between *b* and *v* in both Silvie ANG and Selbie ABD suggests that they derive from Gaelic *sealbh*, earlier *selb*. Its basic meaning is 'possession', but one of its mean-⁷⁶ Fellows-Jensen, 'Scandinavians in Southern Scotland', p. 51.⁷⁷ *Regesta Regum Scottorum* vol.vi (*Acts of David II*) ed. B. Webster (Edinburgh, 1982).⁷⁸ *Charters of the Hospital of Soltre, of Trinity College, Edinburgh, and other Collegiate Churches in Midlothian*, Bannatyne Club (1861).⁷⁹ Nicolaisen, 'Scandinavian Personal Names', p. 226.⁸⁰ Ekwall, *English Place-Names*, p. 369.⁸¹ I am grateful to Dr G. Fellows-Jensen for this suggestion (personal communication).⁸² *Registrum de Panmure*, ed. J. Stuart (Edinburgh, 1874).⁸³ Fellows-Jensen, 'Scandinavians in Southern Scotland', p. 52.⁸⁴ Taylor, 'The Scandinavians in Fife', p. 167.

ings is ‘cattle, herd, flock’, a meaning found already in Old and Middle Irish. See also Balhelvie FIF and Belhelvie ABD, which Watson (1926, 239) would derive from a personal name formed from the associated adjective *sealbhach* ‘rich in possessions’ etc..

SKAITBIE †, Coldingham BWK

Schatteby c.1300 *Cold. Corr.*⁸⁵

Ska(i)tbieburn 1578 *Laing Chrs.*⁸⁶

Sketbieburne 1638 *Laing Chrs.*

The first element may be an OS cand personal name *Skati*, or OWScand *skata* ‘skate’ (fish). It lay somewhere near Coldingham priory.⁸⁷

SMEATON Inveresk MLO

Smithetun 1150 *Dunf. Reg.* no. 2 [granted to Dunfermline Abbey by David I]

Smithibi 1154x59 *Dunf. Reg.* no. 35 [general royal confirmation to Dunfermline = RRS i no. 118]

Smithibi c. 1166 *Dunf. Reg.* no. 50 [general royal confirmation to Dunfermline]

Smihet 1170 *SHR* 30 (1951), 45, 49

Smithibi 1227 *Dunf. Reg.* no. 74 [general royal confirmation to Dunfermline]

Smithetun & *Smith* c. 1230s *Dunf. Reg.* no. 180

Smithetun & *Smith* c. 1230s *Dunf. Reg.* no. 194

Smythetun x 2 1253 *Dunf. Reg.* no. 82

Smyt x 2 1253 *Dunf. Reg.* no. 83

Smetheby 1277 *Dunf. Reg.* no. 81 [general royal confirmation to Dunfermline]

Smeton 1451 *Dunf. Reg.* no. 434 [general royal confirmation to Dunfermline]

The first element is genitive plural either 1) of Anglo-Saxon *smib*, genitive plural *smiba*, or, if the place-name was coined after c. 1100, then of Older Scots *smith*, or 2) of OS cand *smib(r)* ‘smith’. I would suggest for two reasons that 1) is more likely, and that the original generic element was Anglo-Saxon *tūn* (which became Older Scots *toun*), rather than *bý*: firstly the earliest recorded form is with *toun*; secondly the *bý*-forms appear in one strand of charters only—the general royal confirmations to Dunfermline Abbey. This means that we need account for only one replacement of *toun* by *bý*, perhaps by a scribe who came from one of the many areas of England or south-west Scotland where *bý* was common, and automatically, or consciously, substituted *bý* for *toun*. After this, the repeated copying of these charters could account for its multiple occurrence. Such generic element substitution is a recognised feature of place-names coined in various linguistic *milieux*.⁸⁸

Note also Smeaton, Kirkcaldy and Dysart parish FIF (*Smetone* 1513 *Laing Chrs.* no. 297; *Smithtoun* 1516 *Fife Ct. Bk.* 29), which shares the same derivation, although unlike Smeaton MLO, it can scarcely have been coined much before 1150, and may well have been coined a lot later.

SORBIE Ardrossan AYR

Sorbie & *Sorbie-Craigs* 1609 *RMS* vii no. 642

This formed part of barony of Ardrossan, for which see Busby, Ardrossan above. The name occurs frequently elsewhere, not only in England (as Sowerby etc.), the Isle of Man (as Surby), and south-west Scotland (as Sorbie WIG and Sorbie DMF), but also in Argyll (Soroba twice, and Soroby, Tiree). This makes it the most widely distributed of all the *bý*-names

⁸⁵ *The Correspondence, Inventories, Account Rolls and Law Proceedings of the Priory of Coldingham*, ed. J. Raine (Surtees Society, London, 1841).

⁸⁶ *Calendar of the Laing Charters 854–1837*, ed. J. Anderson (Edinburgh, 1899).

⁸⁷ See Nicolaisen, ‘Scandinavian Personal Names’, p. 226.

⁸⁸ I have discussed this phenomenon in relation to Scottish Gaelic place-names in S. Taylor, ‘Generic Element Variation, with Special Reference to Eastern Scotland’, *Nomina* 20 (1997), 5–22.

in the British Isles. It is generally taken to indicate a settlement built on 'sour' *i.e.* poor or unproductive ground.⁸⁹

NOTE: Sorbie, Crail FIF seems to have been transferred from south-west Scotland with the family of the Hannays of Sorbie WIG.⁹⁰ This would explain why it does not appear in the record until the mid-nineteenth century.⁹¹

WEATHERSBIE † Auchterderran (formerly Kinghorn) FIF NT235 948

Weathirsbie 1659 RMS xi no. 80

Weathersbie & Weathersbie Tofts 1757 RHP 1710

Weathersbrae 1775 Ainslie

Wethersby 1815 Sasines no. 10474

Wethers Brae 1850s OS

OScand *veðr* 'wether, castrated ram' + OScand *bý(r)* 'farm'. It lay in the hills south-east of Cardenden, on the 105 m contour, and first appears as part of the barony of Carden. It therefore lay on what had been originally royal demesne land.⁹²

The name is identical to Weddersbie, Collessie FIF, with a singular *veðr* used to represent a plural. Both names underline the importance of sheep-farming amongst the small group of early Scand settlers in Fife.

The same elements are found also in Wetherby YOW England.

WEDDERSBIE Collessie FIF

Wedderisbe also called *Wester Cullessy* 1509 RMS ii no. 3363

Wedderisbye 1515 Fife Ct. Bk. 1

OScand *bý(r)* 'farm' + OScand *veðr* 'wether, castrated ram', with the singular used to represent a plural. Taken along with Weathersbie, Auchterderran FIF (see above), this name underlines the importance of sheep-farming amongst the small group of early Scandinavian colonists in Fife.

⁸⁹ See Fellows-Jensen, 'Viking Settlement', p. 56.

⁹⁰ A.H. Millar, *Fife: Pictorial and Historical* (2 vols) (Cupar, 1895), i, p. 389.

⁹¹ See Taylor, 'Scandinavians in Fife', p. 156. I am grateful to Mr J. Allan of Crail for pointing this out to me. In the light of this, various statements made about Sorbie FIF have to be emended, *e.g.* Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names*, p. 101, Fellows-Jensen, 'Scandinavians in Southern Scotland', p. 51; and Taylor, 'Scandinavians in Fife', p. 158.

⁹² For a full discussion of this place-name, see Taylor, 'Scandinavians in Fife', p. 156.

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